The Transformation of the Meaning of Arabic Words in Indonesian: A Semantic Study of Loanwords and Islamic Concepts in Society

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformation of the meanings of Arabic words absorbed into Indonesian through a semantic analysis of lexicographical sources. The research employs a qualitative, literature-based approach, analyzing 23 Arabic loanwords listed in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language) and comparing them with their original meanings in the Al-Munawwir dictionary. The analysis was conducted by classifying changes in meaning into narrowing, broadening, shifting, amelioration, and pejoration. The results show that Arabic loanwords undergo various semantic changes, including narrowing, broadening, shifting, amelioration, and pejoration. Most religious terms, such as fitrah, ibadah, syariat, and iman, have narrowed in meaning due to the institutionalization of religious practices. In contrast, terms such as hijrah and dakwah have broadened in meaning in line with developments in social discourse and the media. On the other hand, words such as bid'ah and jihad show shifts and pejorative changes influenced by ideological contestation and public representation. These transformations in meaning shape a contextual and dynamic understanding of Islam, but can reduce normative concepts if not accompanied by adequate semantic literacy.

Kata kunci:
Kata Serapan Arab;
Konsep Islam;
Semantik;
Transformasi Makna.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis transformasi makna kata-kata Arab yang diserap ke dalam bahasa Indonesia melalui kajian semantik berbasis sumber leksikografis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka, dengan menganalisis 23 kata serapan Arab yang tercantum dalam Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia dan membandingkannya dengan makna asal dalam kamus Al-Munawwir. Analisis dilakukan melalui klasifikasi perubahan makna yang meliputi penyempitan, perluasan, pergeseran, ameliorasi, dan peyorasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kata serapan Arab mengalami beragam perubahan semantik, meliputi penyempitan, perluasan, pergeseran, ameliorasi, dan peyorasi makna. Sebagian besar istilah keagamaan, seperti *fitrah*, *ibadah*, *syariat*, dan *iman*, mengalami penyempitan akibat institusionalisasi praktik religius, sementara istilah seperti *hijrah* dan *dakwah* mengalami perluasan makna seiring

perkembangan wacana sosial dan media. Di sisi lain, kata seperti *bid'ah* dan *jihad* menunjukkan pergeseran dan peyorasi yang dipengaruhi oleh kontestasi ideologis dan representasi publik. Transformasi makna ini membentuk pemahaman keislaman yang kontekstual dan dinamis, namun berpotensi menimbulkan reduksi konsep normatif jika tidak disertai literasi semantik yang memadai.

INTRODUCTION

In many contexts, language plays an important role in conveying ideas, values, and ideologies. Language is also often considered a reflection of culture and a tool in shaping social meaning (Putri et al., 2025). In the context of Indonesia as a country with a Muslim majority, Arabic plays a very significant role, especially in the religious and spiritual spheres. Arabic is not only present in religious texts such as the Qur'an and hadith, but also permeates everyday life through vocabulary that has become part of the Indonesian language. Many Arabic words have been absorbed into Indonesian, whether through formal religious education, preaching, mass media, or socio-cultural practices with Islamic nuances (Riswanda & Subakti, 2022). Words such as faith, piety, mercy, nature, and jihad are not only used as theological terms, but also to express key concepts in Islam that influence the behaviour, mindset, and social relations of Indonesian Muslims. This adoption process creates complex semantic dynamics, in which the original meanings of these words often undergo adjustments, reinterpretations, and even shifts in meaning in accordance with the evolving local cultural context (Mahfud et al., 2021).

During language adaptation, there has been a significant transformation in the meanings of Arabic words absorbed into Indonesian. This transformation did not occur in a vacuum, but was influenced by various contextual factors such as cultural differences, historical background, communication habits, and the social dynamics of the recipient community (Hakami et al., 2023). For example, the word fitnah in classical Arabic has a positive or neutral semantic meaning, such as "test," "trial," or "proof of faith." However, in Indonesian, the word has undergone narrowing of meaning and a semantic shift to "false accusation," "incitement," or even "conflict," all of which carry negative connotations. This shift shows that the process of word absorption involves not only phonological and morphological aspects but is also influenced by society's collective perception of the social reality they face (Muiz & Nu'man, 2024). This

transformation of meaning shows that linguistic change is essentially a reflection of new meanings constructed within the framework of local culture (Zein et al., 2022).

In addition to linguistic aspects, the transformation of the meaning of Arabic loanwords is also closely related to the construction of ideology and religious practices in society (Anggi, 2021). Loanwords not only change meaning through natural linguistic processes but are also shaped by the dynamics of social discourse, theological interpretations, and political and media interests (Ritonga et al., 2021). For example, the word jihad, which in classical Islamic terminology means "striving in the way of Allah," both spiritually and socially, has undergone a reduction in meaning in various modern media representations that tend to associate it with violence or extremism (Irhamudin, 2021). This shows that the meaning of words is not static but is continually reconstructed in accordance with the dominant narratives that emerge in the public sphere (Haq, 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of Arabic absorption in Indonesian. Sugiyono (2023) highlights that Arabic words in the Qur'an undergo a shift in meaning when they are absorbed into Indonesian, particularly in shaping the community's understanding of religious terms. Wulandari and Nurkholis (2022) expand on this understanding through a morphosemantic study of names in Indonesian society, which shows that the form and meaning of Arabic loanwords have undergone adaptation without losing their religious identity. Hidayati and Prindyanto (2023) review the transformation of meaning from a semantic perspective, arguing that Arabic loanwords not only undergo sound changes but also undergo reinterpretation of meaning in accordance with local communicative needs. Meanwhile, Fauzi (2024) traces the transformation of the definitions of Arabic words in the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language and finds that many terms have undergone narrowing or broadening of meaning during absorption.

Although studies on Arabic loanwords in Indonesian have identified patterns of semantic change across religious texts, naming practices, and lexicographical sources, most research remains limited to text-based descriptive analyses of meaning. Furthermore, previous studies often overlook the socio-religious context in which Islamic concepts are realized and recontextualized through language use, resulting in a limited understanding of the semantic processes that accompany meaning

transformation beyond the lexical level. As a result, the role of semantic change in shaping contemporary interpretations of Islamic concepts in Indonesian society remains under-explored. This condition highlights the need for studies that integrate in-depth semantic analysis with an examination of language use in a socio-religious context to overcome the limitations of previous studies.

Based on this, this study aims to conduct an in-depth semantic analysis of these loanwords. Specifically, this study seeks to identify patterns of semantic change in Arabic words adopted into Indonesian and to understand how these transformations shape the interpretation of Islamic concepts in society. Thus, this study not only focuses on the linguistic aspects of meaning change but also examines public perceptions of the meanings of these words and the social and cultural implications of these changes in a religious context. This study is expected to fill a gap in previous studies, which were limited to descriptions of meaning and did not discuss the sociocultural impact and the semantic processes underlying the transformation of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, library-based approach to analyze changes in the meanings of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian (Widayanti & Dewi, 2024). The research data was selected purposively with the following operational criteria: (1) the word originates from Arabic; (2) the word has become an official entry in the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI); (3) the word is used in the religious and social spheres of Indonesian society; and (4) the word shows a difference in meaning that can be identified through comparison with the original meaning in the Al-Munawwir Arabic-Indonesian Dictionary. Based on these criteria, this study identified 23 Arabic loanwords as units of analysis, which were then presented in a meaning-comparison table as the study's primary data.

Data analysis was conducted using a coding scheme based on semantic theory, covering five categories: narrowing of meaning, broadening of meaning, shift in meaning, amelioration, and pejorative change. Each word was coded based on a comparison between the lexical meaning in Arabic (Al-Munawwir) and the meaning in Indonesian (KBBI). To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation, whereby the results of meaning coding were corroborated by prior scientific literature on semantic studies and Arabic–Indonesian loanwords. This triangulation aimed to

ensure the consistency of the classification of meaning changes while strengthening the methodological validity of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Arabic Loanwords in Indonesian

Arabic loanwords in Indonesian exhibit distinctive characteristics that are closely linked to their semantic development, particularly due to their historical transmission through Islamic preaching and the translation of classical religious texts (Nur & Nawas, 2025). As shown in the semantic comparison in Table 1, most Arabic loanwords retained in Indonesian pertain to religious and socio-religious concepts, such as إِيمَان (faith), تَقْوَى (piety), أَخْلَاق (morals), شَرِيعَة (Islamic law), and عِبَادَة (worship). The concentration of these terms within a specific semantic field demonstrates that borrowing from Arabic involves not only linguistic transfer but also the institutionalization of Islamic concepts within Indonesian society. This semantic specialization explains why many of these words later experienced narrowing or reinterpretation of meaning, as their usage became increasingly regulated by local religious discourse (Habibi & Malik, 2024).

From a phonological perspective, sound adaptation facilitates the entry of Arabic loanwords into everyday Indonesian usage and, subsequently, their semantic change. Arabic phonemes that do not exist in Indonesian, such as 'ain (ع), ḥā' (ح), and qāf (ق), are systematically simplified, resulting in forms such as عِلْم becoming *ilmu*, تَقْوَى becoming *takwa*, and قَلْب becoming *kalbu* (Shah & Mardiah, 2023). This phonological naturalization allows the borrowed forms to circulate widely beyond liturgical contexts, thereby increasing their exposure to reinterpretation and semantic narrowing. In this sense, phonological change is not treated as an independent analytical focus, but as a linguistic precondition that enables the semantic shifts identified in the data, particularly the reduction of broad theological meanings into more practical or ritualized interpretations (Fadli & Savitri, 2022).

Morphological adaptation further strengthens this process by integrating Arabic loanwords into the productive system of Indonesian grammar. Many borrowed nouns and adjectives undergo affixation, producing forms such as *keislaman*, *pengislaman*, and *mengislamkan* from إِسْلَام, and dirahmati and berrahmat from رَحْمَة (Sofa & Musthofa,

2022). This morphological productivity expands the functional range of the loanwords and facilitates semantic extension or contextual redefinition in social and institutional discourse (Khamimah et al., 2022). Consequently, phonological and morphological adaptations function as supporting mechanisms that enable Arabic loanwords to be fully integrated into Indonesian, thereby creating conditions under which systematic semantic change, such as narrowing, expansion, or pejoration, can occur, as evidenced by the lexicographic comparison in this study. Based on this analytical framework, the following table presents the empirical data of Arabic loanwords examined in this study, including their original meanings in Arabic, their meanings in Indonesian, and the corresponding types of semantic change identified.

Table 1. Changes in the Meaning of Arabic Loanwords

No	Words in Arabic	words in Indonesian	Meaning in Dictionary (Al Munawwir)	Deep meaning (KBBI)	Types of Semantic Change
1	فِطْرَة	fitrah	Original state; human nature since birth	The original purity of humans; zakat al-fitr	Narrowing
2	هِجْرَة	hijrah	Relocation for the sake of religious safety	A change in attitude or lifestyle towards religion	Expansion
3	جِهَاد	jihad	Strive earnestly in the way of Allah	Struggle; often associated with conflict	shift
4	بِدْعَة	bid'ah	New creations/ Innovations	Religious practices are considered deviant	pejoration
5	ظَالِم	zalim	Perpetrators of injustice according to God's law	Unfair; cruel	Narrowing
6	إيمَان	iman	Faith and justification of the heart	Faith: religious belief	Narrowing

7	تَقْوَى	takwa	Protecting oneself from God's wrath	Faithfully following religious precepts	Narrowing
8	أَخْلَاق	akhlak	Temperament or character	Morals; ethics	Narrowing
9	شَرِيعَة	syariat	God's comprehensive legal system	Religious rules (especially worship)	Narrowing
10	عِبَادَة	ibadah	All forms of servitude to God	Religious rituals	Narrowing
11	دَعْوَة	dakwah	Invitation or call	Islamic broadcasting activities	expansion
12	رَحْمَة	rahmat	The love of Allah	Grace; mercy	expansion
13	بَرَكَة	berkah	Increasing divine goodness	Good fortune; smooth flow of sustenance	Shift
14	إخْلَاص	ikhlas	Purity of intention for the sake of Allah	Sincerity; acceptance of circumstances	Narrowing
15	نِفَاق	nifak	Hypocrisy in faith	Insincerity; social hypocrisy	Shift
16	سُنَّة	sunnah	All the words and deeds of the Prophet	Habit	Narrowing
17	إمَام	imam	Leader; a person who is followed	Leader of prayer	Narrowing
18	أُسْتَاذ	ustaz	Teacher; instructor; scholar	Religious teacher; religious leader	Narrowing
19	عِلْم	ilmu	Knowledge; correct understanding	General knowledge	Narrowing
20	حُكُم	hukum	Decision; normative (sharia) decision	Regulations; decisions	Narrowing
21	حَلَال	halal	Something that is	Allowed; fit for	Narrowing

			permitted by Sharia law	consumption	
22	صَلَاة	Salat	Prayers and worship	Certain ritual worship	Narrowing
23	دَاعِش	Daesh	Acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (name of a specific group)	Symbol of extremism/terroris m	Expansion & pejorative

The Process of Transforming the Meaning of Arabic Loanwords

The process of transforming the meanings of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian involves various forms of change, influenced by sociocultural, religious, and pragmatic contexts. One of the most common forms of meaning change is narrowing of meaning (تضييق المعنى), whereby the word's broad Arabic meaning becomes more specific in Indonesian usage (Firdaus & Yohanes, 2023). For example, the Arabic word فطرة (fitrah) denotes "human nature" or "innate sacred qualities that one is born with." However, in Indonesian, the term fitrah is more commonly used to refer to zakat fitrah (زكاة الفطر), an obligatory donation for Muslims during Ramadan. an obligatory charitable donation paid at the end of Ramadan (Hidayah et al., 2023). This semantic narrowing is observable in multiple domains of use. In public discourse and news texts, fitrah frequently appears in fixed collocations such as pembayaran fitrah or kewajiban fitrah, indicating its restricted ritual-economic meaning. Similar tendencies are documented in academic research, such as in the study by Ritonga et al. (2021), which shows that Arabic loanwords in Indonesian religious contexts commonly undergo semantic narrowing when their meanings become institutionally attached to specific ritual practices, including zakat-related terminology. Likewise, sermons and religious textbooks predominantly employ fitrah in discussions of Ramadan obligations rather than its broader theological sense of human nature. These patterns confirm that the Indonesian term fitrah has shifted from a comprehensive anthropological concept to a specialized ritual reference (Gani, 2022).

In addition to narrowing, Arabic loanwords also undergo expansion of meaning (توسيع المعنى), whereby their scope is broadened to allow their use in more general or

metaphorical contexts. For example, the term هجرة (hijrah) historically refers to the Prophet Muhammad's physical migration from مكة (Mecca) to المدينة (Medina). In Indonesian, hijrah has evolved into a symbol of lifestyle change and spiritual transformation. Expressions such as hijrah hati (هجرة القلب) or spiritual hijrah illustrate how the meaning of the word has expanded to encompass internal processes and moral transformations that extend beyond physical migration. This expansion of meaning demonstrates the flexibility of language in keeping pace with the dynamics of social change and evolving societal values (Luhuringbudi et al., 2024).

In addition, the process of meaning shift (تحول المعنى) is also very evident in the transformation of Arabic loanwords. This meaning shift refers to a significant change in a word's meaning relative to its original meaning. For example, the phrase ظلم (zalim) in Arabic has a profound theological connotation related to grave sin resulting from injustice that is contrary to Allah's law. However, in Indonesian, the word zalim is more commonly understood as "unfair" or "cruel" in a broader social sense, without emphasis on the religious aspect (Khairudin et al., 2024). Another example is the word جهاد (jihad), which traditionally means "struggle in the way of Allah" with a strong religious connotation. In Indonesia, the meaning of jihad has shifted, allowing it to be used to encompass a range of struggles, from personal self-improvement to broader social struggles. This shift in meaning reflects a process of reinterpretation adapted to the cultural and social context of society (Pangestu & Mubarok, 2025).

Equally important are the forms of meaning transformation known as amelioration (تحسين المعنى) and pejoration (تدهور المعنى). Amelioration is a change in the meaning of a word to a more positive or honourable one (Jose, 2024). For example, the word دعوة (dakwah), which previously only meant verbal invitation in a religious context, now has a broader meaning that encompasses organised social and educational activities, including digital dakwah and social movements. Conversely, pejorization is the process by which a word's definition shifts toward greater negativity or derogation. The Arabic word بدعة (bid'ah) neutrally means "innovation." However, in the Indonesian socio-religious context, it often undergoes pejorative change and is used to label practices that are considered deviant or heretical. These processes of amelioration and pejorative change

illustrate the dynamics of word meaning, which are greatly influenced by ideological values and public perception (Uyuni et al., 2024).

Overall, the transformation of the meanings of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian results from complex interactions among language, culture, and communicative context. Previous phonological and morphological adaptations facilitated the development of meanings that aligned with social and religious needs (Hasanah & Sofa, 2025). From a relational, semantic, and pragmatic perspective, the meaning of words is not static. However, it changes with their relationships within the language system and with the context in which they are used. This makes the process of meaning transformation a reflection of the lively and dynamic nature of language, as it absorbs and internalises foreign cultural influences while forming a distinctive local identity (Jannah et al., 2025).

Factors Affecting Meaning Transformation

Sociocultural, linguistic, and technological factors influence the transformation of the meanings of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian. The first factor is the socio-cultural context of the receiving community (Rakhmat & Qohar, 2024). For example, the Arabic word صلاة (shalat) denotes prayer in general. However, in Indonesia, its meaning is not limited to the obligatory ritual of prayer. However, it can also refer to specific traditions and practices within the local culture, such as congregational prayers at the mosque at certain times or additional religious rituals. This adaptation of meaning occurs to make the word more appropriate and acceptable within local cultural values (Saladin et al., 2025).

The second factor is the pragmatic function of communication. For example, the word جهاد (jihad) literally means "struggle in the way of Allah." However, in everyday Indonesian communication, this term is also used to describe struggles in various fields, such as jihad against poverty, jihad in learning, or jihad in protecting the environment. The meaning of the word shifts according to the purpose and context of the conversation, so that the message conveyed becomes more relevant and acceptable to the listener (Latifah et al., 2023).

Then, the role of mass media and information technology became important factors in accelerating changes in meaning. For example, the word داعش (Daesh), which was initially the name of a particular group in Arabic, became a powerful symbol for

various groups in Indonesia to describe extremism or terrorism in general through media coverage and social media. The spread of the word through digital media has broadened its meaning and led to adjustments that are not always identical to the original meaning (Pujiati et al., 2025).

Furthermore, interactions between social groups and religious education significantly shape the transformation of meaning. A concrete example is the word بدعة (bid'ah), which in classical texts means "innovation." However, in religious education and interactions between Muslim groups in Indonesia, this word is often used with negative connotations to reject religious practices that are considered deviant from the teachings. Formal religious education that emphasises certain aspects of this term also shapes public perception, causing the meaning of the word to become pejorative.

Social Perceptions of the Meaning of Arabic Loanwords in the Context of Local Culture

In the linguistic dynamics of Indonesian society, perceptions of Arabic loanwords are shaped not only by their original lexical meanings but also by social values, local culture, and religious interpretations that have developed over time. A study by Shidiq et al. (2023) explains that Indonesians, who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, often interpret Arabic words in a more pragmatic, contextual manner (Shidiq et al., 2023). For example, the term "barakah" (بَرَكَة) in Arabic refers to blessings or an abundance of goodness from Allah (Sudjatnika & Shafarini, 2022). However, in the study by Malik et al. (2022), it was found that in social practice, this word is often associated with economic and family success, as well as smooth sailing in work matters, so that its spiritual meaning is blended into a worldly interpretation (Malik et al., 2022).

Similarly, empirical discourse analysis reveals that the term ikhlas (إِخْلَاص), which etymologically means pure intention solely for Allah, is often used in everyday interactions in Indonesia to signify surrender, emotional acceptance, or passivity. In her research, Ukhrawiyah (2019) explains that this semantic narrowing recurs across various contexts of educational and public communication. This reduction in meaning is empirically linked to local cultural values that emphasize social harmony and conflict avoidance, rather than as an isolated interpretive assumption (Ukhrawiyah, 2019). Then, research conducted by Firdaus and Yohannes (2025) explains that the word "sharia"

(شَرِيعَة) is primarily understood in relation to ritual practices such as dress codes or marriage regulations, while broader social, political, and economic dimensions remain underrepresented in public discourse (Firdaus & Yohanes, 2023). This confirms that the narrowing of meaning is institutionally reinforced through repeated patterns of usage (Anis et al., 2022).

In particular local cultures, such as Java or Lombok, Arabic words are often given a nuance of refinement or politeness through their pronunciation or use in religious greetings. For example, Suparmanto et al (2024) argue that the term "ustaz" (أستاذ) functions not only as a title for formal religious teachers but also as a marker of social authority and respect, even among individuals without formal Islamic educational qualifications. This expansion reflects a pattern of address that can be observed in local communities rather than a purely theoretical semantic change (Suparmanto et al., 2024). Conversely, empirical analysis of religious polemics consistently shows negative perceptions of the term bid'ah (بِدْعَة). Ghufron et al. (2025), through an analysis of fatwas and public religious debates, show that the term bid'ah is often used as a stigmatizing label to delegitimize local religious practices such as tahlilan and maulid, even though these practices are accepted in many traditional Muslim communities (Ghufron et al., 2025). This shows that negative semantic perceptions arise from ideological contestation rather than neutral linguistic evolution (Rachmadhani, 2020).

These perceptions did not arise suddenly but rather result from interactions among religious education, media narratives of proselytisation, historical experiences of colonialism, and the dominance of certain groups in defining religious terms. In urban communities, perceptions of Arabic words are often shaped by digital da'wah trends and literalistic Salafi-modernist discourse (Rijal, 2025). In contrast, in rural areas, these words are more flexible and interpreted within a cultural context rich in symbols and traditions. This shows that the transformation of meaning is not only a linguistic product, but also a complex socio-ideological phenomenon. Therefore, the way society interprets words borrowed from Arabic is crucial to understanding semantic change. This not only shows a shift in meaning but also that it is reproduced, negotiated, and even politicised in accordance with social needs and group identity (Iskandar, 2023).

The Implications of Meaning Transformation on the Understanding of Islamic Concepts in Society

The transformation of the meaning of Arabic words absorbed into Indonesian has had a significant impact on how people understand Islamic teachings. Many terms have undergone narrowing, broadening, or even distortion of meaning, leading to differences between normative understanding (as explained in classical Islamic sources) and practical understanding that has developed in society (Riswanda & Subakti, 2022). As in Mutmainnah Baso's (2019) research, which conducted a semantic analysis of 25 Arabic religious terms in Indonesian, more than half of these terms exhibited narrowing or shifts in meaning in actual usage. These changes were identified through a systematic comparison between dictionary definitions and contemporary usage, which revealed differences between classical Islamic meanings and those used in everyday religious discourse (Baso, 2019). One clear implication of this transformation is evident in the use of the term نفاق (nifāq). Ridwan (2023) documents that religious terms with strong theological specificity tend to undergo semantic narrowing when used in non-textual contexts. In Indonesian usage, nifāq is generally used to indicate dishonesty or pretense in general, rather than hypocrisy of faith as defined in the literature of the Qur'an and hadith. This illustrates how doctrinally specific concepts are reinterpreted into broader moral categories in everyday communication (Ridwan, 2023).

This change in meaning also has implications for differences in understanding among Muslim communities (Schaefer, 2021). The study by Julul et al. (2020) found that the term سنة (sunnah) in Indonesian society is generally understood to refer to optional religious practices rather than to the entirety of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ traditions and behaviors. This finding is based on an analysis of the use of the term in popular religious discourse and learning materials, which shows a tendency to reduce the technical meaning to a narrower practical meaning (Julul et al., 2020). These differences in understanding have the potential to influence religious attitudes and patterns of interaction between groups, especially in the context of assessing worship practices (Purkon, 2022).

The implications of this transformation of meaning are also evident in the structure of religious leadership and authority. Research by Hidayati and Prindyanto

(2023) shows that the term إِمَام (imām) in Indonesian is predominantly used to refer to the leader of prayer, even though in Islamic tradition this term has a broader meaning, including social and religious leadership (Hidayati & Prindyatno, 2023). This narrowing of meaning is reflected in the use of the term in mosques, educational institutions, and religious media, thereby shaping a more limited collective perception of the role of religious leaders (Satriawan, 2023).

The impact of semantic transformation is also evident in religious education. Empirical research on Arabic loanwords in Indonesian shows that semantic shifts occur when religious terms are used outside their original context, with implications for understanding in the learning environment. For example, Shidiq et al. (2023) found that many Arabic religious terms undergo semantic narrowing or broadening when absorbed into Indonesian, often without clarification of their original nuances in educational materials (Shidiq et al., 2023). This pattern shows that presenting key concepts without explaining their original context can lead learners to form limited or partial understandings. These findings indicate that semantic changes in the teaching context can shape how students internalize core Islamic concepts differently from their classical meanings (Kosim, 2023).

For example, the term علم ('ilm) has been empirically proven to be treated as general "knowledge" in the context of learning in Indonesia, whereas classical Islamic studies define 'ilm with integrated spiritual, ethical, and devotional dimensions. Baso's (2019) semantic analysis of religious terms observes this pattern of simplification, in which 'ilm loses its contextual depth outside of scientific discourse (Baso, 2019). While classical sources emphasize its ethical and devotional scope, research shows that the use of education in Indonesia often neglects these dimensions (Rafsanjani & Handican, 2023). Therefore, educational institutions, both formal and informal, must actively clarify and enrich the understanding of religious terms so that they remain consistent with their original meanings.

On the other hand, semantic transformation can also facilitate the inculturation of Islamic values in local communities. Rijal (2025) documents that the term hijrah has expanded in Indonesian religious discourse from historical migration to a symbol of moral and spiritual change relevant to contemporary social life (Rijal, 2025). Their analysis of media, sermons, and community texts shows that this expanded usage

resonates particularly with young Muslims seeking social and ethical transformation. This expanded interpretation reflects a communicative adaptation that makes Islamic concepts more meaningful and relevant in specific socio-cultural contexts in Indonesia, bridging traditional teachings with lived experience (Harifah, 2025).

However, without a critical linguistic and theological framework, semantic transformation risks conceptual deviation. Studies on the adoption of Arabic terms highlight that uncontrolled narrowing or shifting can separate key Islamic concepts from their doctrinal foundations. For example, the same study by Hidayati & Prindyanto (2023) notes that terms with ethical and jurisprudential significance can be interpreted superficially if learners and educators are unaware of their deeper scientific meaning (Hidayati & Prindyatno, 2023). This pattern shows that semantic changes alone, without critical engagement, can result in interpretations that deviate from substantial classical values (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Semantic transformation also influences the construction of Islamic identity among Indonesians. On the one hand, the expansion of meaning allows Islamic expression to adapt to local cultural idioms, thereby facilitating acceptance among various segments of society. On the other hand, research by Nisa et al. (2025) shows that if meaning transformation occurs without a historical or theological foundation, individuals may develop understandings that differ from classical formulations (Nisa' et al., 2025). This finding is in line with Baso's (2019) study, which shows that semantic shifts in core terms affect how identity is articulated and experienced, especially in communities where religious language intersects with everyday norms (Baso, 2019).

In the context of public policy, the use of Arabic terms such as حكم (ḥukm), شريعة (sharī'ah), or حلال (ḥalāl) requires careful examination to avoid oversimplification. Muslim et al. (2022) empirically demonstrate that these terms are often reduced in Indonesian administrative discourse to general legal labels rather than categories with defined jurisprudential content (Muslim et al., 2022). Their analysis of policy documents and legal texts shows that ḥukm, for instance, is frequently rendered simply as "rule" or "decision," despite classical fiqh encompassing categories such as فرض (farḍ), سنة (sunnah), حرام (ḥarām), مكروه (makrūh), and مباح (mubāḥ). This pattern of semantic

reduction in public policy contexts highlights how meaning transformation can alter public understanding of complex Islamic legal concepts (Saidah & Tawakkal, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the transformation of the meanings of Arabic words in Indonesian is a process shaped by the interaction of linguistic, cultural, religious, and media factors. Arabic loanwords undergo various forms of meaning change—including narrowing, broadening, shifting, amelioration, and pejorative change—which arise in response to the communicative needs and social dynamics of Indonesian society. Phonological and morphological adaptation provides an entry point for these semantic changes, which are then shaped by religious practices, local traditions, and the construction of public discourse. The results of the study show that words such as fitrah, hijrah, jihad, bid'ah, and zalim have undergone significant semantic transformations, indicating that the adoption of Arabic vocabulary is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a representation of values, identity, and ideology that continue to adapt.

This study also confirms that this transformation of meaning has direct implications for how people understand Islamic concepts in their daily lives. The shift from normative meaning to practical or cultural meaning yields a more contextual understanding of religion, but also risks deviation if it is not accompanied by adequate semantic and religious literacy. The findings of this study contribute to enriching Arabic–Indonesian semantic studies by emphasising the importance of understanding changes in meaning within a broader social framework. Therefore, collaboration among linguists, educators, and scholars is needed to maintain the consistency of the meanings of Islamic terms while ensuring that the semantic transformations that occur remain aligned with the substantive values of Islam and are relevant to the cultural realities of Indonesian society.

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