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Artificial Intelligence in Arabic-Malay Qur'an Translation: Potentials, Limits, and Scholarly Oversight

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Abstract
This article examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into Malay. The topic is important because Qur'anic translation involves not only lexical transfer, but also rhetorical force, theological precision, and sensitivity to Malay Islamic usage. Using a qualitative document analysis approach, this study reviews recent scholarship on Qur'anic translation, AI-assisted translation, Arabic natural language processing, and Arabic language learning published mainly between 2020 and 2026. The analysis shows that AI can support translators in several ways, especially by accelerating draft production, improving lexical consistency, and assisting the comparison of alternative renderings across large textual corpora. However, the literature also demonstrates persistent weaknesses in handling near-synonymy, polysemy, legal verses, figurative language, and context-bound theological meanings. For the Arabic-Malay pair, these weaknesses become more pronounced because translation quality depends on both Arabic semantic depth and the established exegetical style of Malay Islamic discourse. The article argues that AI should be positioned as an assistive instrument rather than an autonomous translator of the Qur'an. A hybrid workflow is therefore proposed, combining AI-generated drafts with tafsir-based validation, terminology control, and expert human post-editing. The study contributes a focused synthesis for Arabic-Malay translation studies and offers practical implications for Arabic learning, translator training, and future corpus development.
Keywords: Qur'an; Translation; Arabic-Malay; Artificial Intelligence; Neural Machine Translation; Tafsir-Informed Translation

INTRODUCTION
The translation of the Qur'an has always occupied a special and sensitive place in Islamic scholarship. Unlike ordinary interlingual transfer, Qur'anic translation must negotiate the relationship between the Arabic source text, exegetical tradition, and the expectations of target-language readers (Haroun, 2025). For this reason, many scholars continue to emphasise that a translation of the Qur'an is not a substitute for the Arabic revelation, but an interpretive rendering of its meanings (Boulaouali, 2021). This issue is especially important in the Malay context. Studies

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on Malay Qur'anic translation show that translators must deal with metaphor, ellipsis, rhetorical shift, culturally loaded expressions, and theological nuances that do not always map neatly onto Malay structures or idiom(Ariffin & Mansor, 2022). Recent work on Qur'anic euphemism in Malay likewise demonstrates that even when a translation is linguistically smooth, it may still distort register, weaken euphemistic force, or produce semantic over-expansion(Mohd Saad et al., 2024).

At the same time, AI has rapidly entered the fields of Arabic learning, translation, and digital text processing (Al-Shaboul et al., 2025). Studies indicate growing interest in AI-assisted Arabic teaching, mobile applications, automated translation, and NLP-based learning tools (Abou Adel, 2022; Borham et al., 2024; Khan, 2020; Othman & Asbulah, 2025; Sumiarni et al., 2026). This broader educational development has made it necessary to reassess what AI can and cannot do when the source text is sacred, semantically dense, and rhetorically complex. More specifically, recent studies on AI and Qur'anic translation provide a mixed picture. Research on Qur'anic puns, legal verses, synonymy, and polysemy shows that AI systems can generate serviceable initial drafts, but often fail to preserve layered meaning without human revision (Abdalhussein, 2025; Albalawi, 2025; Albalawi & Abdul-ghafour, 2024). Other work points to promising developments in sentiment preservation and large-scale translation automation, suggesting that AI can contribute meaningfully when it is embedded within controlled and validated workflows (Gaanoun & Alsuhaibani, 2025; Khair & Sawalha, 2025).

Despite these developments, a focused synthesis on AI for Arabic-Malay Qur'anic translation remains limited. Existing studies often concentrate either on English translations, on general Arabic NLP, or on Arabic learning applications without directly addressing the interaction between Qur'anic semantics and Malay religious discourse. This gap matters because Arabic-Malay translation is shaped not only by language structure but also by pedagogical tradition, tafsir usage, and the long-standing authority of established Malay renderings. Accordingly, this article has three objectives. First, it identifies the principal linguistic and theological challenges that shape Arabic-Malay Qur'anic translation. Second, it analyses the strengths and limitations of current AI approaches as reported in recent scholarship. Third, it proposes a defensible hybrid workflow for the use of AI in Qur'anic translation, one that remains anchored in scholarly review rather than technological automation alone.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative document analysis design. The corpus for analysis consists of selected scholarly publications on four overlapping themes: (i) Qur'anic translation and Malay translation studies, (ii) AI-assisted translation and large language models, (iii) Arabic NLP and semantic processing, and (iv) AI in Arabic language learning. Priority was given to publications from 2020 to 2026 in order to align the discussion with recent developments, while a small number of foundational sources were retained where necessary to clarify technical background. The documents were selected purposively based on three criteria: relevance to Arabic-Malay Qur'anic translation, relevance to AI or machine translation in Arabic-related contexts, and accessibility of source information sufficient for citation verification. The collected works were then grouped thematically and read comparatively. The analysis focused on recurring problems in meaning transfer, especially near-synonymy, polysemy, legal terminology, figurative

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language, and post-editing requirements. This article offers a critical synthesis of existing evidence and a conceptual framework for practice. This design is suitable because the present concern is not to advertise a particular tool, but to clarify where AI can function responsibly in a domain that requires *dalalah* (semantic indication), *balaghah* (rhetorical force), and *tafsir* (exegetical explanation) to be considered together.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the role of artificial intelligence in Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation is best understood through a balanced and critically delimited framework. The literature does not support two extreme positions that often dominate public discussion. On the one hand, it does not support the claim that AI is now capable of functioning as an autonomous and trustworthy translator of the Qur'an into Malay. On the other hand, it also does not support the claim that AI is irrelevant or unusable in this field. What the evidence suggests instead is a more nuanced conclusion: AI can contribute meaningfully to selected stages of the translation process, especially those involving preliminary drafting, lexical comparison, retrieval, consistency checking, and corpus-supported analysis, but it remains structurally dependent on scholarly oversight whenever translation quality depends on theology, rhetoric, legal nuance, and interpretive caution. This conclusion is consistent with recent studies that compare AI and human translation of Qur'anic legal verses, investigate the treatment of Qur'anic puns through AI and post-editing, and examine the preservation of sentiment in Qur'an translation using AI-assisted methods. Together, these studies indicate that AI may become an increasingly useful component of Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation practice, but only when it is embedded in a disciplined framework of human validation and methodological transparency (Abdalhussein, 2025; Albalawi & Abdul-ghafour, 2024; Gaanoun & Alsuhaibani, 2025).

The significance of this conclusion becomes clearer when viewed against the broader development of Arabic language technology and AI-assisted language learning. Recent studies have documented the growing use of artificial intelligence in Arabic teaching, digital learning kits, automated analysis, and language-support applications. Such work demonstrates that AI is increasingly being integrated into Arabic educational environments and that researchers are actively exploring how machine-assisted systems can support instruction, communication, and language practice. At the same time, this same body of literature repeatedly points to persistent linguistic and technical barriers, especially in relation to Arabic morphology, syntax, ambiguity, and semantic complexity. The implication for Qur'anic translation is straightforward. If AI still faces substantial difficulties in processing Arabic generally, then these difficulties are likely to intensify rather than diminish when the source text is the Qur'an, whose discourse is distinguished by elevated rhetoric, semantic density, intertextual depth, and theological weight (Abou Adel, 2022; Borham et al., 2024; Othman & Asbulah, 2025; Sumiarni et al., 2026).

The present section therefore develops the discussion along seven interconnected lines. First, it argues that Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation should be regarded as a high-sensitivity translational domain. Second, it identifies the areas in which AI can genuinely assist the translation process. Third, it explains why AI remains structurally insufficient as a stand-alone translator of the Qur'an. Fourth, it shows why fluency alone is not an adequate benchmark for sacred-text translation quality. Fifth, it argues that human review must be interdisciplinary rather than purely

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linguistic. Sixth, it outlines the implications of these findings for Arabic learning, translator training, and corpus development. Finally, it proposes a transparent hybrid workflow as the most viable future model for the responsible use of AI in Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation.

Arabic–Malay Qur'anic Translation as a High-Sensitivity Domain

A central finding of this study is that Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation must be treated as a high-sensitivity translational domain rather than as an ordinary case of bilingual transfer. This claim rests on both theological and linguistic grounds. From the theological perspective, a translation of the Qur'an is not generally understood in Islamic scholarship as a substitute for the Arabic revelation itself. Rather, it is an interpretive rendering of the meanings of the Arabic text. This distinction matters because it immediately raises the bar for translational responsibility. If the target text is interpretive rather than revelatory, then the translator or any system assisting the translator must work under a regime of restraint, accountability, and awareness of exegetical limits. Boulaouali (2021) in his historical-theological exploration of Qur'an translation, stresses that the translation of the Qur'an must be understood within a broader religious debate about access, understanding, and theological responsibility. Likewise, Al Farisi (2023) argues that the acceptability of a Qur'an translation cannot be assessed purely at the level of language form, since the translated text remains accountable to interpretive, doctrinal, and reception-based criteria.

In the Malay context, this issue is even more pronounced because Qur'anic translations are widely used in settings beyond private devotional reading. They circulate in lectures, sermons, teaching materials, classroom settings, and digital religious discourse. This means that a translation into Malay does not merely mediate linguistic meaning; it also shapes pedagogical and religious understanding. Several studies on Malay Qur'anic translation confirm that the challenge is not simply lexical. Ariffin and Mansor (2022) identify metaphor, ellipsis, rhetorical shift, and stylistic constraints as significant difficulties in rendering the Qur'an into Malay. Mohd Saad et al. (2024) show that the translation of Qur'anic euphemisms into Malay remains vulnerable to ambiguity even where the target sentence appears acceptable at the surface level. Saad and Rouyan (2024) likewise demonstrate that translation approach materially affects the accuracy of Malay renderings of Qur'anic euphemism. These studies together suggest that Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation is not just a matter of "finding the right words" in Malay. It is a matter of preserving the semantic, rhetorical, and ethical force of the source text in a target-language environment with its own Islamic discursive norms.

The high-sensitivity character of this domain is further reinforced by the kinds of linguistic phenomena that the Qur'an presents to the translator. Legal verses demand terminological precision and interpretive restraint, especially where key terms carry implications for jurisprudence or ritual practice. Narrative passages often compress theological meanings into highly economical language, meaning that translation choices may either preserve or flatten significant layers of interpretation. Poetic and rhetorical verses depend on imagery, sound patterning, contrast, semantic intensification, and carefully selected lexical alternatives. Near-synonyms and polysemous expressions create a further level of complexity. Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2022) show that Qur'anic near-synonyms retain contextual distinctions that are not always captured by translation. Alduhaim (2021) similarly demonstrates, through the study of Qur'anic near-synonyms and their English renderings, that seemingly close lexical items cannot always be

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treated as interchangeable without semantic loss. Albalawi (2025) extends this concern by examining AI and human collaboration in relation to Qur'anic synonymy and polysemy, showing that such semantic categories remain deeply challenging even when AI is used as an assistive tool. These issues become particularly significant when one considers the long-standing tradition of Malay Islamic discourse. Malay renderings of the Qur'an do not exist in a vacuum. They are received against a background of established translation practices, tafsir traditions, and expectations of stylistic dignity. A translation that sounds smooth in modern Malay but weakens the solemnity, euphemistic restraint, legal force, or rhetorical tension of the original may therefore be inadequate even if it appears linguistically successful in ordinary translation terms. Kamarudin et al. (2026), in their study of rhetorical imperative sentences in the Qur'an and their translation into Malay, remind us that even structural choices in the target language can reshape the thematic and rhetorical force of the original. This suggests that Qur'anic translation into Malay cannot be judged merely by general readability or grammatical correctness. It must also be judged by its ability to preserve the interaction between meaning, rhetoric, and devotional seriousness.

The same conclusion is strongly supported by the recent literature on AI-assisted Qur'anic translation. Abdalhussein's (2025) study comparing AI and human translations of legal verses in Surah al-Mā'idah shows that AI may demonstrate speed and consistency yet still underperform when doctrinal and juridical nuance must be preserved. Albalawi and Abdul-Ghafour (2024) in their study of Qur'anic Arabic puns, show that AI can provide an initial translation, but that layered meaning and stylistic adequacy emerge only after two rounds of human post-editing. Gaanoun and Alsuhaibani (2025) in their work on sentiment preservation in Qur'an translation, explicitly combine Transformer-based AI methods with human validation. This recurring pattern is highly revealing. It suggests that researchers working closest to the problem of Qur'anic translation have not concluded that AI can translate sacred text independently. Instead, they repeatedly design their methods around the assumption that AI needs human control precisely because sacred-text translation involves meaning that is context-sensitive, layered, and value-laden.

A further reason this domain must be treated as highly sensitive is that standard machine-translation evaluation habits are inadequate for it. In mainstream MT and NLG research, there has been increasing criticism of simplistic evaluation practices. Callison-Burch et al. (2006) famously challenged the over-reliance on BLEU as a proxy for translation quality. Lee et al. (2019) argue that good human evaluation of generated text requires clear distinctions among adequacy, readability, and semantic preservation. Freitag et al. (2021) show that human evaluation of modern machine translation is itself a difficult problem and that poor evaluation procedures can lead to mistaken conclusions. Licht et al. (2022) propose a human evaluation framework centered more explicitly on semantic equivalence. When these insights are brought into the domain of Qur'anic translation, the implications become more demanding rather than less. If general-purpose translation already resists single-metric evaluation, then sacred translation where semantic drift may have theological consequences requires an even more multidimensional approach.

This leads to a more precise understanding of what "error" means in Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation. In ordinary translation, an error may be tolerated if the general message remains accessible. In Qur'anic translation, however, an error may be qualitative rather than merely quantitative. A mistranslated legal term, a flattened euphemism, a weakened rhetorical contrast, a premature disambiguation of a polyvalent expression, or an over-domesticated

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rendering of a theologically loaded phrase can alter the way readers understand the source text. Such changes affect not only language, but also interpretation. For that reason, the present study concludes that Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation is best approached as a high-sensitivity domain in which methodological caution, doctrinal awareness, rhetorical sensitivity, and explicit scholarly responsibility are intrinsic to the act of translation itself.

Table 1. Selected Literature and Its Relevance to Arabic–Malay Qur'anic Translation

Study	Main Focus	Core Finding	Relevance to This Study
Boulaouali (2021)	Historical-theological status of Qur'an translation	Translation of the Qur'an is interpretive, not a substitute for revelation	Frames the theological sensitivity of translation
Ariffin & Mansor (2022)	Style in Malay Qur'an translation	Metaphor, ellipsis, and rhetorical form are difficult to preserve	Shows why Malay rendering is not merely lexical
Mohd Saad et al. (2024)	Qur'anic euphemism in Malay	Ambiguity persists even in apparently acceptable translations	Highlights the risk of surface fluency
Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2022)	Qur'anic near-synonyms	Contextual distinctions are not always preserved in translation	Demonstrates semantic precision problems
Albalawi & Abdul-Ghafour (2024)	Qur'anic puns, AI, and post-editing	AI can draft, but nuanced meaning requires human post-editing	Shows the limit of raw AI output
Abdalhussein (2025)	AI vs. human translation of legal verses	AI is fast and consistent but weaker in legal-theological nuance	Supports the high-sensitivity argument
Gaanoun & Alsuhaibani (2025)	Sentiment preservation in Qur'an translation	AI methods still require human validation	Confirms the need for hybrid workflows
Othman & Asbulah (2025)	AI problems in Arabic grammar and morphology	Arabic digitization remains hindered by deep linguistic challenges	Explains why AI errors persist in sacred translation

Where AI Can Genuinely Help

Although Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation is a high-sensitivity domain, another major finding of this study is that AI can nevertheless provide real and meaningful assistance when its role is carefully limited. The current literature does not support a total rejection of AI. Instead, it points toward specific zones of usefulness. The clearest of these is preliminary draft generation. In several relevant studies, AI is not presented as a final translator, but as a system capable of producing a first-pass rendering that can then be evaluated, corrected, or replaced by human experts. Albalawi and Abdul-Ghafour (2024) use AI to generate initial translations of Qur'anic puns, but the machine output then undergoes two rounds of professional human post-editing. Gaanoun and Alsuhaibani (2025) similarly integrate AI into a larger analytical framework that includes human validation. Khair and Sawalha (2025) show that large language models can make large-scale translation of Islamic literature technologically feasible, especially in corpora such as al-Shamela, while also indicating the need for structured control.

The significance of these studies lies not merely in the fact that AI can "produce text", but in the specific kinds of tasks for which that production is useful. In the context of Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation, AI seems most genuinely helpful in at least four areas. First, it can accelerate initial draft production, thereby reducing the time needed to move from a blank source segment to

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a preliminary target-language candidate. Second, it can assist lexical comparison by surfacing multiple candidate expressions more quickly than manual drafting alone would allow. Third, it can support consistency checking, particularly where repeated terms, formula, or recurring expressions need to be monitored across a corpus. Fourth, it can function diagnostically by revealing where the model consistently fails, thereby helping scholars identify systematic weaknesses in lexical handling, ambiguity, rhetorical compression, or domain-specific semantics. These are practical, non-trivial contributions, and they should not be dismissed simply because AI remains inadequate for final publication.

The usefulness of AI in these roles also aligns with wider machine translation research. Koehn and Germann (2014) demonstrate that the quality of machine translation directly affects the amount of human post-editing effort required. This finding has major implications for a high-sensitivity domain such as Qur'anic translation. It suggests that better machine output can indeed make a human workflow more efficient, but only if the machine output is treated as provisional rather than authoritative. In other words, the value of AI lies not in replacing scholarly labor, but in redistributing it. Tasks that are repetitive, low-level, or exploratory can be accelerated by AI, allowing human experts to concentrate more intensely on the parts of the process that require interpretive, rhetorical, and theological judgment.

Another meaningful contribution of AI lies in exploratory semantic analysis. Even when AI-generated translations are not publication-ready, they may still reveal patterns that are useful to researchers and translators. For instance, if a model repeatedly chooses a generic Malay equivalent for a legally loaded Arabic term, this may indicate that the corpus or training context fails to encode sufficient legal distinction. If a model consistently flattens metaphor into explanatory prose, or replaces euphemism with explicit wording, that too becomes useful evidence of what kinds of Qur'anic language remain difficult for machines to process adequately. AI can therefore function not only as a text generator, but also as a research instrument that exposes where semantic loss, overgeneralization, or interpretive narrowing are most likely to occur. In this sense, AI may help scholars understand the boundaries of computational adequacy more clearly, which is itself a valuable scholarly outcome.

The role of AI in corpus-supported work is particularly promising. Gaanoun and Alsuhaibani (2025) explicitly describe the construction of a new parallel dataset involving the Arabic Qur'an and seven English translations as part of their sentiment-preservation study. This demonstrates the value of structured comparative corpora for advanced translation analysis. In the Arabic–Malay context, a carefully curated corpus of authoritative Malay renderings, aligned with Arabic verses and enriched with annotations for rhetoric, legal terminology, and semantic nuance, could make AI more effective as a retrieval, comparison, and drafting tool. Kudo and Richardson (2018) through SentencePiece, and Ott et al. (2019) through fairseq, provide the technical background for how subword tokenization and extensible sequence modeling can support machine translation workflows more broadly. While these are not Qur'an-specific contributions, they help explain the technical infrastructure through which domain-specific improvement might be pursued.

AI also appears useful in educational settings, provided it is framed critically rather than unreflectively. Research on AI in Arabic learning shows growing interest in the educational benefits of artificial intelligence, including opportunities for more interactive and responsive

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language learning. Abou Adel (2022) discusses the potential of artificial intelligence for Arabic learning, while Borham et al. (2024) show that AI concepts can be integrated into the development of E-Muhadathat kits for non-Arabic speakers. Sumiarni et al. (2026) demonstrate that AI is already transforming Arabic language learning from the perspectives of both teachers and students. In the context of Qur'anic translation, this suggests that AI can function as a pedagogical tool through contrastive analysis. Students can compare AI-generated Malay renderings with authoritative or instructor-approved translations and then identify where the machine weakens semantic precision, over-smooths stylistic form, or misreads rhetorical force. This turns AI into an object of critique rather than a source of passive dependence.

The present study insists that AI's usefulness must be expressed carefully. Overstating AI's role would be as misleading as denying it altogether. The evidence supports a middle position: AI can genuinely help Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation in preparatory, comparative, diagnostic, and pedagogical tasks, but these tasks must remain embedded within a human-governed process. The more one moves from draft generation toward final interpretive decision, the less legitimate it becomes to rely on AI without scholarly intervention. Thus, the real question is not whether AI can help, but where it can help without distorting the scholarly structure of sacred translation.

Why AI Still Cannot Stand Alone

A third major finding of this study is that AI still cannot stand alone in the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into Malay. This conclusion does not merely reflect a conservative preference for human translation. Rather, it emerges from the nature of the evidence itself. The studies most directly concerned with Qur'anic translation do not show AI replacing human scholarship. Instead, they show AI requiring post-editing, human validation, or domain-aware correction precisely in those areas where translation becomes semantically, rhetorically, or doctrinally delicate. Abdalhussein (2025) shows that legal verses remain difficult for AI because legal and theological nuance are easily diluted. Albalawi and Abdul-Ghafour (2024) show that AI-generated translations of Qur'anic puns require multiple rounds of post-editing to recover intended meaning and stylistic appropriateness. Gaanoun and Alsuhaibani (2025) explicitly include human validation within their methodology. These are not incidental methodological choices. They suggest that the researchers themselves recognise the inability of current AI systems to guarantee a publishable or doctrinally safe rendering on their own.

One reason AI cannot stand alone is that sacred translation often requires what may be called principled restraint. A good Qur'anic translation is not always the one that sounds most idiomatic in the target language. Sometimes fidelity demands preserving an Arabic term, retaining a degree of ambiguity, resisting explanatory expansion, or choosing a less colloquial phrase in order to avoid narrowing meaning. Such decisions require not only linguistic competence, but judgment about what the translator has the right to make explicit and what should remain interpretively open. This kind of judgment is not naturally aligned with the default behavior of generative language models, which are optimized to produce plausible, complete, and contextually coherent output. In many ordinary domains, this tendency may be beneficial. In sacred translation, however, it can become dangerous, because it encourages over-completion, lexical smoothing, and premature disambiguation.

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This becomes especially clear in relation to near-synonymy and polysemy. Abdul-Ghafour et al. (2022) show that Qur'anic near-synonyms retain contextual differences that are not always reflected in translation. Alduhaim (2021) similarly demonstrates that close lexical items cannot simply be treated as equivalent without loss. Albalawi (2025) extends this problem into the domain of AI-human collaboration, showing that machine-assisted work still struggles to preserve the distinctions involved in synonymy and polysemy. A stand-alone AI system may generate a fluent Malay rendering, yet still erase semantic contrasts that matter to the source text. The problem, therefore, is not merely that AI selects the "wrong word," but that it may select a superficially adequate word that subtly narrows the interpretive range of the verse. This is precisely the kind of error most difficult to detect if one judges output primarily by fluency.

Another reason AI cannot stand alone is that current evaluation regimes remain insufficient to license full autonomy in sacred translation. Human-evaluation research in machine translation consistently warns against simplistic judgments. Freitag et al. (2021) show that human evaluation of modern high-quality MT systems is itself difficult, and that weak evaluation designs can lead to erroneous conclusions. Van der Lee et al. (2019) argue for best practices that distinguish among multiple evaluation dimensions. Licht et al. (2022) propose a more semantically grounded human evaluation framework for translation quality. These works indicate that even in non-sacred translation settings, the relationship between machine output and trustworthy evaluation remains methodologically complex. If that is already the case for general translation, then the threshold for authorizing stand-alone AI translation of the Qur'an should be even higher. No existing evidence in the literature suggests that this threshold has been reached.

The post-editing literature also undermines simplistic claims about autonomy. Koehn and Germann (2014) show that machine translation quality affects post-editing effort, not that it eliminates the need for post-editing. The practical implication is clear: the better the machine becomes, the more efficient the workflow may become, but the human role remains constitutive rather than residual. This insight is especially important in Qur'anic translation, where a lightly supervised output may be more dangerous than an obviously rough one. A highly fluent Malay sentence that subtly distorts legal force or rhetorical balance may pass unnoticed by non-specialist readers and be accepted as a faithful rendering of the source. The risk here is not just translational inaccuracy, it is misplaced trust.

There is also an epistemic and ethical reason AI cannot stand alone. A model can produce output, but it cannot bear religious, scholarly, or legal responsibility for that output. OECD's AI Principles emphasise trustworthy AI, human-centered values, and accountability. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence identifies transparency, fairness, and human oversight as core principles and explicitly frames human dignity and rights as central to AI governance. COPE states that AI tools cannot meet the requirements for authorship because they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work. Applied to Qur'anic translation, these principles become even more compelling. A translation of the Qur'an is not just another text output. It carries interpretive authority in the eyes of readers. Since AI cannot be answerable for doctrinal distortion, rhetorical loss, or scholarly misrepresentation, the burden of responsibility remains entirely with the human translator or editor. That fact alone is sufficient to disqualify the notion of stand-alone AI translation in this domain.

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For all of these reasons, the present study concludes that the realistic question is not whether AI can be made more impressive, but whether it can independently sustain the standards of restraint, accuracy, accountability, and doctrinal safety required for Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation. The current evidence suggests that it cannot. Its outputs may be useful, but they are not self-authorizing. Its speed may be attractive, but it does not confer interpretive legitimacy. Its fluency may be convincing, but it does not guarantee fidelity. Therefore, the path forward lies not in searching for a fully autonomous AI translator of the Qur'an, but in designing stronger forms of human-AI collaboration in which the machine's usefulness remains subordinate to scholarly judgment.

Why Fluency Alone Is Not an Adequate Measure of Quality

A fourth finding of this study is that fluency, although important, cannot be treated as the primary benchmark for evaluating AI-assisted Qur'anic translation. This is a crucial point because one of the most persuasive features of contemporary language models is their ability to generate text that appears coherent, natural, and stylistically well-formed. In many applied contexts, this can create the impression that fluency is equivalent to quality. Yet the broader machine translation literature repeatedly challenges that assumption. Callison-Burch et al. (2006) argue that BLEU should not be treated as a sufficient proxy for translation quality. Wieting et al. (2019) propose semantic-similarity-based optimization precisely because lexical overlap does not capture adequacy well enough. Licht et al. (2022) argue for a human evaluation metric focused more directly on semantic equivalence. Van der Lee et al. (2019) likewise insist that readability, adequacy, and semantic preservation must be distinguished rather than collapsed into one overall impression. These studies collectively show that a text may be highly readable while still being semantically deficient.

The implications of this problem become sharper in sacred translation. In Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation, a target sentence may sound graceful and persuasive while still weakening the theological, legal, or rhetorical force of the source. Indeed, the very fluency of the sentence may make the problem more dangerous, because it encourages trust. This is especially relevant in Malay-speaking religious contexts where readers may not directly compare the translation with the Arabic source and may assume that a polished rendering is necessarily faithful. Yet studies in Qur'anic translation suggest that this assumption is unsafe. Abdalhussein (2025) shows that AI-generated translations of legal verses can appear acceptable while remaining less precise than human renderings in capturing doctrinal and juridical nuance. Albalawi and Abdul-Ghafour (2024) show that an AI translation may produce a workable draft of a punning verse while still missing the rhetorical and semantic richness that the verse requires. Thus, fluency may coexist with substantive inadequacy.

A further danger is that fluency encourages overconfidence among both users and evaluators. The more naturally a sentence reads, the easier it becomes to overlook subtle semantic losses. In sacred translation, this is a serious issue. A fluent Malay rendering may omit the force of a legal restriction, erase a euphemistic layer, reduce the dignity of a rhetorical form, or select one meaning where the source remains deliberately polyvalent. These losses may not be obvious to non-specialist readers, especially if the target sentence appears stylistically strong. As a result,

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fluency can function as a mask. It does not merely fail to guarantee fidelity, but it can make fidelity harder to evaluate because it creates the impression that the translation is already settled.

In the Malay Qur'anic context, this concern is heightened by the existence of an established exegetical register. Malay religious discourse often values clarity, but it also values restraint, solemnity, and doctrinal discipline. A translation that sounds contemporary and "natural" in a broad colloquial sense may still be less suitable than a slightly more formal rendering if the former oversimplifies theological vocabulary or reduces rhetorical gravity. Ariffin and Mansor (2022) show that style itself is a translational challenge in Malay Qur'an translation. Mohd Saad et al. (2024) and Saad and Rouyan (2024) show that euphemistic accuracy can be compromised even when the language appears smooth. These findings suggest that in Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation, the evaluator must ask not only whether the text reads well, but whether it reads well in a manner that remains accountable to the source text's semantic and rhetorical burden.

The present study therefore argues for a multidimensional evaluation framework in which fluency is deliberately decentered. Fluency remains important, because an unreadable translation is of limited pedagogical and devotional value. However, fluency must be assessed alongside semantic adequacy, theological precision, legal safety, terminological consistency, rhetorical sensitivity, and suitability of register. In this framework, a slightly less idiomatic rendering may be preferable to a smoother one if the former preserves doctrinal scope more accurately. Such an approach is methodologically more demanding, but it is also more appropriate to the translation of a sacred text. In short, fluency is a sign of craftsmanship, not proof of fidelity.

Human Review Must Be Interdisciplinary Rather Than Purely Linguistic

A fifth major finding of this study is that human review in Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation cannot be treated as a purely linguistic activity. This point follows directly from the earlier findings. If AI-generated output can be fluent while still semantically, rhetorically, or theologically deficient, then simple proofreading for grammar and style is not enough. A grammatically skilled editor may improve flow, collocation, and lexical smoothness, yet still leave untouched deeper problems of legal implication, interpretive narrowing, or rhetorical distortion. The broader literature on machine translation evaluation strongly supports the need for layered human judgment. Van der Lee et al. (2019) and Licht et al. (2022) show that meaningful evaluation requires multiple perspectives on quality rather than a single undifferentiated score. Freitag et al. (2021) likewise demonstrate that explicit error analysis provides a more reliable basis for human evaluation than generalized impressions.

When this insight is applied to Qur'anic translation, the need for interdisciplinarity becomes even clearer. The problem set is not homogeneous. Some errors arise from misreading Arabic syntax or morphology. Others arise from mishandling a semantic field or collapsing distinctions between near-synonyms. Others are theological or jurisprudential, involving the translator's treatment of an expression that has consequences for doctrine or practice. Still others are rhetorical and stylistic, involving register, emphasis, euphemism, metaphor, and the overall dignity of the target-language expression. Because these problem classes are different in nature, they cannot be fully supervised by one form of expertise alone. A Malay stylist may improve readability while missing a legal distortion. A tafsir-oriented reviewer may detect a doctrinal issue

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but produce target language that lacks stylistic balance. A translation theorist may understand equivalence but miss the full weight of Arabic morphological or rhetorical structure.

At minimum, four knowledge domains appear indispensable for responsible review. The first is Arabic linguistic competence, including syntax, morphology, semantics, and discourse-level analysis, because Qur'anic translation problems often arise from structurally dense expressions, semantic-syntactic relations, and the rhetorical specificity of Arabic itself (Othman & Asbulah, 2025). The second is tafsir-informed theological competence, because many Qur'anic expressions derive their force not only from lexical meaning, but also from the exegetical traditions through which their doctrinal, legal, and contextual implications are understood (Boulaouali, 2021). The third is translation-studies competence, including awareness of equivalence, explicitation, domestication, foreignization, register management, and post-editing judgment, since the evaluation of AI-assisted translation cannot be reduced to fluency alone and requires multidimensional human assessment (Albalawi & Abdul-ghafour, 2024). The fourth is refined Malay expressive competence, because the final rendering must remain readable, dignified, and normatively appropriate within Malay Islamic discourse, especially in relation to style, euphemism, and the preservation of rhetorical force in the target language (Mohd Saad & Rouyan, 2024). The absence of any one of these domains risks a skewed outcome: literalism without rhetorical life, fluency without doctrinal safety, or theological caution without communicative clarity.

This interdisciplinary requirement has consequences not only for personnel, but also for workflow. Human review should not be imagined as a single final stage applied after AI drafting has already settled the main contours of the translation. Rather, it should be layered and iterative, because research on human evaluation and machine translation has shown that inadequate evaluation procedures can produce misleading conclusions, while more reliable assessment depends on explicit error analysis, semantic equivalence, and careful review design (Freitag et al., 2021; Licht et al., 2022; Van der Lee et al., 2019). In the context of Qur'anic translation, this means that a first layer of review may examine source fidelity, especially where ambiguity has been collapsed, meaning narrowed, or unwarranted additions inserted. A second layer may assess doctrinal and legal safety, particularly in verses related to ritual, law, or theological attributes. A third layer may refine Malay register, rhetorical balance, and consistency with accepted religious style. This kind of staged human intervention is also consistent with recent Qur'anic AI studies, which show that machine-generated renderings require post-editing and validation when the text involves legal nuance, layered meaning, or rhetorical density (Abdalhussein, 2025; Albalawi & Abdul-ghafour, 2024). Accordingly, what matters is not bureaucratic complexity for its own sake, but the recognition that sacred translation demands more than one type of expertise and therefore more than one type of review.

An interdisciplinary review model also helps explain why disagreement among human experts should not necessarily be treated as a sign of failure. In Qur'anic translation, disagreement may instead be a productive indication that the verse resists reduction to a single smooth paraphrase. A linguist may prefer one rendering because it preserves syntactic relations more faithfully, while a tafsir specialist may prefer another because it avoids doctrinal over-commitment; likewise, a stylist may suggest revisions that preserve dignity without sacrificing intelligibility. This logic is compatible with broader work on human evaluation, which repeatedly

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shows that translation quality cannot be reduced to one undifferentiated judgment and that careful assessment benefits from multiple criteria and calibrated human perspectives (Licht et al., 2022). It is also supported by recent Qur'anic AI studies showing that human post-editing strengthens linguistic accuracy and better preserves theological and aesthetic richness where AI alone remains insufficient (Abdalhussein, 2025). For that reason, interdisciplinary review is a part of the minimum scholarly architecture required for responsible Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation in the age of AI.

Table 2. Productive Functions of AI and the Corresponding Human Review Needs

Translation Stage	Productive Function of AI	Main Risk if Left Unreviewed	Most Relevant Human Expertise
Initial drafting	Fast production of candidate Malay renderings	Semantic narrowing or misleading completion	Arabic semantics, translation studies
Lexical comparison	Rapid generation of alternatives	False synonymy or unstable terminology	Arabic linguistics, tafsir
Repeated terminology	Consistency across corpus segments	Mechanical consistency that ignores context	Tafsir, terminology control
Figurative verses	Preliminary paraphrase of complex imagery	Loss of metaphor, euphemism, or rhetorical force	Balāghah, Malay stylistics
Legal verses	Basic propositional rendering	Doctrinal or juridical dilution	Fiqh, tafsir, Arabic semantics
Teaching use	Source of discussion and correction practice	Student overconfidence in fluent output	Arabic pedagogy, translation training
Corpus construction	Retrieval, alignment, and pattern detection	Noise entering the corpus	Corpus design, post-editing, scholarly review

Implications for Arabic Learning, Translator Training, and Corpus Design

A sixth finding of this study is that AI-assisted Qur'anic translation should reshape how Arabic learning, translator training, and corpus design are conceptualized. If AI can already produce plausible target-language output, then future expertise will increasingly depend not only on the ability to translate, but also on the ability to evaluate translation critically. This has direct consequences for Arabic learning. Traditional language instruction often emphasizes vocabulary, morphology, and grammar as the primary gateways to accurate understanding. These remain essential, but they are no longer sufficient in an environment where AI can generate surface-level fluency. Students must also be trained to detect where fluent output masks semantic drift, where a generic equivalent has replaced a doctrinally precise term, where rhetoric has been flattened, and where ambiguity has been resolved too quickly. In other words, AI raises the threshold for what counts as strong linguistic competence. It is no longer enough to read the target text and say that it "sounds right." The learner must be able to ask whether it preserves the interpretive burden of the source.

Several studies on AI and Arabic education support the urgency of this shift. Abou Adel (2022) discusses how artificial intelligence may help bypass some traditional limitations in Arabic learning, but also implies the need for critical pedagogical use. Borham et al. (2024) present the integration of AI concepts into E-Muhadathat kits for non-Arabic speakers and note the importance of designing Arabic-learning software around genuine linguistic realities rather than technological optimism alone. Sumiarni et al. (2026) show that AI is already transforming Arabic learning from

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the perspectives of both teachers and students. These works suggest that AI will become increasingly embedded in Arabic pedagogy, but they do not support passive dependence. Rather, they point toward a model of AI literacy in which students are taught how to use AI critically, comparatively, and with awareness of its limitations.

The implications for translator training are even more direct. If future translators are likely to encounter AI-generated drafts as part of professional or academic workflows, then training programs must move beyond traditional source-to-target exercises and include domain-sensitive post-editing competence. Trainees need to learn how to identify machine error types, when to revise and when to reject a draft, how to preserve terminological stability without erasing semantic nuance, and how to document the rationale for translation choices. For Qur'anic translation specifically, this means students should be exposed to passages involving legal terminology, euphemism, metaphor, near-synonymy, and rhetorical compression. They should learn not only to improve machine output, but to explain why the machine output is inadequate in the first place. Baihaqi et al. (2025) in their work on enhancing Arabic translation competency in higher education, underscore the importance of structured translation training. Mubarak et al. (2025) similarly discuss translation teaching strategies shaped by cultural understanding. These studies are not Qur'an-specific, but they support the broader pedagogical claim that translation expertise must be consciously trained rather than assumed.

Another implication concerns the place of evaluation literacy in translator education. Given the broader MT research discussed earlier, students should be taught that translation quality cannot be reduced to a single metric or impression. The critique of BLEU by Callison-Burch et al. (2006), the emphasis on semantic similarity by Wieting et al. (2019), and the more nuanced human evaluation models proposed by Van der Lee et al. (2019), Freitag et al. (2021), and Licht et al. (2022) all suggest that future translators need a more sophisticated understanding of how quality is assessed. This is especially important in Qur'anic translation because metrics that ignore theological, rhetorical, and exegetical considerations can produce false confidence. Translator training should therefore include evaluation as a substantive area of study rather than treating it as a secondary or purely technical matter.

The corpus-design implications are perhaps the most strategic. One of the clearest lessons from current scholarship is that AI performance depends heavily on the structure, relevance, and quality of the data on which systems are trained or evaluated. Gaanoun and Alsuhaibani's (2025) work on sentiment preservation demonstrates the value of constructing a specific parallel dataset in order to address a defined translational problem. More generally, tools such as SentencePiece (Kudo & Richardson, 2018) and fairseq (Ott et al., 2019) illustrate how modern translation systems depend on structured textual resources. In the Arabic–Malay Qur'anic domain, this suggests that future progress will depend less on generic scaling and more on carefully curated corpora. Such corpora should ideally include aligned Arabic and Malay texts, metadata on verse type, annotations for near-synonymy and polysemy, labels for legal terminology and rhetorical devices, and notes on relevant exegetical distinctions. A resource of this kind would support both human translators and AI-assisted workflows by making difficult translational phenomena more visible and more systematically manageable.

Human-in-the-loop corpus building offers a promising model here. Rather than treating the corpus as a static archive, scholars can use AI-generated proposals as provisional material, which

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is then corrected, annotated, and retained as part of a growing supervised dataset. Over time, this would create a virtuous cycle. AI output would expose recurrent weaknesses; human experts would correct them; those corrections would enrich the corpus; and future AI tools would become more useful within the same domain. Such an approach does not erase the need for human scholarship. It organizes that scholarship more effectively and makes it more computationally useful. For Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation, this may be one of the most important long-term contributions of AI, not autonomous translation, but the gradual strengthening of scholarly infrastructure.

Toward a Transparent Hybrid Workflow

The final and most constructive finding of this study is that the most viable future model for Arabic–Malay Qur'anic translation is a transparent hybrid workflow. Such a workflow rejects two unhelpful extremes. It rejects the naive assumption that AI can now serve as an autonomous translator of revelation. At the same time, it also rejects the claim that AI is inherently unusable in sacred translation. The evidence from Qur'anic translation studies, Arabic NLP research, MT evaluation, and AI ethics supports neither extreme. What it supports is a model in which AI performs limited but genuine assistive functions, while final responsibility, interpretive judgment, and doctrinal accountability remain with human experts.

This conclusion also aligns with contemporary ethical guidance on AI. The OECD AI Principles frame trustworthy AI in relation to human-centred values, accountability, and responsible stewardship((OECD), n.d.), while UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence emphasizes transparency, fairness, and meaningful human oversight ((UNESCO), 2021). COPE also states explicitly that AI tools cannot qualify as authors because they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work ((COPE), 2023). Applied to Qur'anic translation, these principles suggest that the legitimacy of AI assistance depends not only on output quality, but also on process transparency, human accountability, and explicit disclosure of how machine output has been reviewed and validated. In a sacred-text context, opacity about process is not a minor technical issue, it directly affects reader trust and the perceived reliability of the translation.

The value of such a workflow lies in its realism. It accepts that AI can save time, generate alternatives, and support comparison, but it also accepts that AI cannot bear responsibility, defend translation decisions, or determine theological acceptability (Koehn & Germann, 2014). In other words, the hybrid model does not distribute authority equally between human and machine; it distributes tasks unequally and appropriately. The machine handles speed, patterning, and preliminary suggestion, while the human handles judgment, responsibility, validation, and final formulation. This asymmetry is not a weakness. It is the condition under which responsible collaboration becomes possible, particularly in high-stakes domains where trustworthy AI, human oversight, and documented accountability are required as part of good scholarly practice ((OECD), n.d.).

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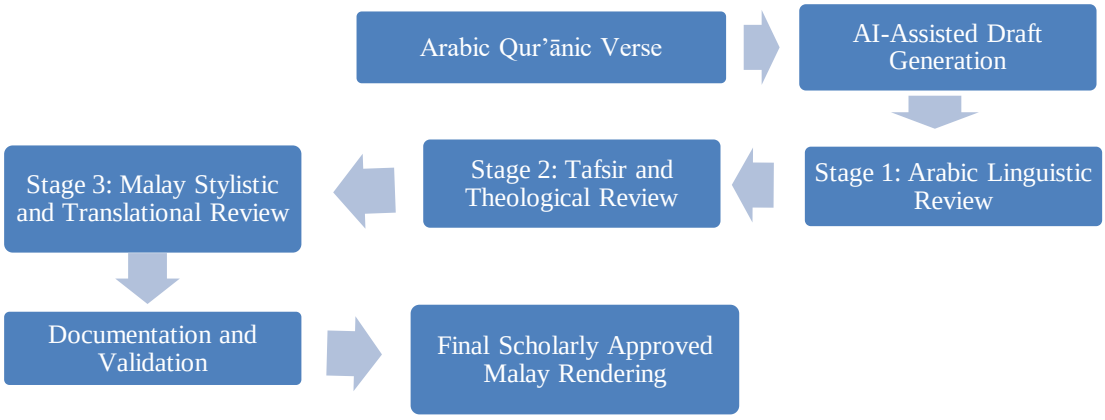
Figure 1. Proposed Transparent Hybrid Workflow for Arabic–Malay Qur'anic Translation



CONCLUSION

This article has argued that AI should be understood as a powerful but limited assistant in the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into Malay. The literature shows that AI can accelerate draft production, support lexical comparison, and assist corpus-level analysis. It can also be pedagogically useful in Arabic learning environments where students are trained to compare, critique, and post-edit machine output. Yet the same literature demonstrates that current systems remain unreliable whenever translation depends on contextual meaning, rhetorical compression, legal precision, and exegetical sensitivity. For that reason, Arabic-Malay Qur'anic translation cannot responsibly be delegated to AI alone. A defensible practice requires a hybrid workflow in which AI is used for preliminary drafting and comparison, while final decisions remain under expert human control informed by tafsir, Arabic semantics, and Malay Islamic usage. Future work should prioritise the development of verified Arabic-Malay Qur'anic corpora, domain-specific terminology resources, and training modules that integrate AI literacy with classical translation competence. In this way, AI can contribute to Arabic learning and translation studies without displacing the scholarly judgement that sacred-text translation necessarily demands.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All participants received a comprehensive explanation regarding the research objectives and procedures, including their right to participate voluntarily. Participants were assured that participation was not mandatory and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study without negative consequences. To ensure the confidentiality of identities, all data obtained in this study underwent an anonymization process.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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