ALSUNIYAT: Jurnal Penelitian Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya Arab, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17509/alsuniyat.v9i1.98642

ALSUNIYAT
JURNAL PENELITIAN BAHASA, SASTRA, DAN BUDAYA ARAB

Journal homepage: https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/alsuniyat

The Dynamics of Expanding and Narrowing the Meaning of Arabic Language Absorption Words in Online KBBI: Diachronic Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Submitted/Received 12 March 2026
First Revised 05 April 2026
Accepted 26 April 2026
Publication Date 30 April 2026

Keywords:
Arabic loanwords
Diachronic semantic
Generalization
KBBI Online
Specialization

ABSTRACT

This study examines the semantic transformation of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian through diachronic comparative analysis. Using online KBBI as the primary source and *Lisān al-'Arab* as an etymological benchmark, this research tracks meaning shifts in 45 lexical units selected through purposive sampling based on etymological recognition and discernible meaning differences. The findings reveal a predominance of semantic specialization (64.5%), indicating meaning narrowing where general Arabic terms acquire specific references. For instance, *ustadz* (any expert) narrows to "Islamic teacher," and *kitab* (any book) narrows to "holy scripture." This pattern predominantly associates with religious contexts, suggesting systematic adjustment to Islamic discursive traditions. Conversely, generalization (35.5%) reflects functional expansion where religious terms adapt into broader domains. Examples include *akibat* ("heel" with negative connotation) expanding. These findings illustrate dynamic lexical adaptation, demonstrating how Indonesian speakers negotiate meaning according to socio-cultural landscapes. The novelty lies in utilizing KBBI Online, an authoritative, periodically updated digital platform, as primary data, departing from static print-based studies relying on outdated editions. This digital approach offers current semantic reflections and provides critical foundations for nuanced language policies and sociolinguistic studies globally.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian is one of the languages in the world that is flexible and adaptive to foreign terms, especially in an effort to enrich its vocabulary to meet increasingly complex communication needs (Murny & Hamdani, 2022). Among the various donor languages that make significant contributions, Arabic occupies a very strategic and fundamental position due to the intensity of its interaction that has taken place for centuries in the archipelago. The use of Arabic words in Indonesian has become an integral part of the evolution of language in Indonesia (Hakami, Nabil, Rohman, Ramadhany, & Dzikraa, 2023). The entry of Arabic vocabulary into Indonesian began with oral use by speakers of both languages, which later developed into written form (Sofa & Musthofa, 2022).

The process of absorbing Arabic vocabulary into the structure of the Indonesian language is a very dynamic linguistic phenomenon, involving a wide and diverse range of cultural transmission channels. Historically, the inclusion of this vocabulary began from economic and trade factors as well as political-religious relations that occurred during the process of interaction of the Arab nations (Malik, Habibi, Aan, & Harianto, 2022). This has caused thousands of Arabic terms to enter and be widely used in Indonesian vocabulary. This process occurs through several adjustments, such as changing sounds (phonology) to match the way Indonesian speakers pronounce and changing the shape of words (morphology) following the rules of word formation in Indonesian. In addition, these words also often adjust in sentence composition (syntax) and the expansion or narrowing of meaning (semantics) according to the context of their use in society (Khairudin, Nuur, Hamzah, & Abduh, 2024).

However, the most crucial and profound phenomenon in the study of contemporary linguistics does not simply lie in how an absorbed word is pronounced or written according to the refined spelling, but how the substance of its meaning survives or undergoes transformation, because each word improvises and evolves in such a way as to suit the needs of the language user (Ansori, 2021). This also applies to Arabic loanwords in Indonesian, whose semantic evolution is primarily driven by the cognitive adaptation of the archipelago's speech community to their socio-cultural environment, rather than by developments within the donor language itself (Landmann, 2026).In a historical semantic perspective, words that move from the source language to the recipient language often change meaning. The original meaning of the word can shift due to the natural development of the language as well as differences in social context, communication needs, and cultural background of the recipient society that uses it (Jannah, Satriawan, & Ridho, 2025).

In linguistic discourse, this change in meaning is theoretically generally categorized into two main currents that are opposite but equally significant, namely the expansion of meaning (generalization) which is the process of changing meaning from the specific to the general and the narrowing of meaning (specialization) which is the process of changing meaning which initially has a broad meaning and then the meaning changes to be limited to only one meaning (Salbiah & Idris, 2022). The expansion of meaning occurs when a term that was initially technical or specific begins to be used by society more broadly in the everyday context. On the other hand, narrowing of meaning occurs when the meaning of the current word or the new

meaning of a word becomes specific, small, or detailed from the previous meaning (Hidayati & Prindyanto, 2023).

A number of previous studies have attempted to document this phenomenon of Arabic language absorption by using various diverse methodological perspectives to photograph the process of language integration. Some previous researchers focused their attention on descriptive solutions oriented towards changes in phonetic and phonemic aspects, namely how the Arabic sound system is adapted to the rules of Indonesian spelling (Zaidan, Rahman, & Zailani, 2018), as well as how Religious Arabic absorbs the process of phonological change of words into Indonesian by classifying sounds that undergo a process of change (Khairudin et al., 2024). This method is indeed considered very effective for mapping the process of standardizing the writing of absorbed words in formal grammar. However, it often ignores the much more complex dimensions of meaning change and has broader sociolinguistic implications for language users in practical contexts.

Several previous studies have also begun to touch on semantic aspects, especially the change in the meaning of some Arabic vocabulary into Indonesian in general, as done by Faizetul Ukhrawiyah. This study explains the change in meaning that occurs in some Arabic vocabulary words that are absorbed into Indonesian in general. However, the identification process is only for a few vocabulary without mapping their changes and developments from time to time (Ukhrawiyah, 2019), The research conducted by Ukrawiyah remain significantly limited as they only identified meaning changes in a small number of vocabulary items without conducting chronological mapping or tracing their semantic development over time, and failed to utilize data from contemporary digital sources that reflect actual language use in society.

This makes significant contributions to the linguistic literature, especially in the field of historical semantics and the study of language contact between Arabic and Indonesian, as happened in Arabic, which experienced progress in developing and enriching its language (Wandira, Giani, Madani, & Salsabila, 2025). Although it has not yet mapped the development of meaning chronologically, this study has succeeded in documenting the phenomenon of meaning changes that occur factually in the use of Arabic absorption vocabulary in general.

Although many studies have been conducted, there are major limitations in previous studies that need to be sharply criticized to make room for new, more relevant research. Many previous semantic studies tended to be static. They were less able to capture the dynamics of rapid language change due to their exclusive reliance on outdated Indonesian dictionaries that rarely undergo periodic revision. This has led to a phenomenon of a shift in meaning that occurs in the digital era, where the use of popular language on social media has developed very massively due to modernization (Zamhari et al., 2025) as well as globalization (Rahmawati, Yulianeta, Hardini, Sunendar, & Fasya, 2022), often missing comprehensive scientific observations, so the data produced do not reflect current linguistic realities.

In addition to the limitations of data sources, methodological weaknesses can also be seen in the lack of use of authoritative and nationally integrated digital lexicography platforms in contemporary semantic research in Indonesia. Previous researchers have not maximized the use of the country's official digital lexicography platform or language use in limited

communities, but rather focused on the formal definitions that have been standardized by state language institutions. As a result, the generalizations or conclusions produced are sometimes inaccurate in capturing the lexical status of a word in the national language structure that is officially recognized in the Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language (KBBI), making it difficult to standardize the analysis to be accounted for academically. This is different if the understanding of the definition of an absorption word is based on a formal definition as contained in the online KBBI, because the online KBBI is always updated dynamically so as to facilitate the development and renewal of Indonesian vocabulary (Lubis, 2023).

This research is presented as a strategic effort to overcome these various limitations by utilizing KBBI Online as a primary data source that is very authoritative and up-to-date in linguistic studies. As a digital dictionary platform managed directly by the Language Development and Development Agency, KBBI Online is the most prominent manifestation of digital lexicography in Indonesia that always reflects the latest lexical updates that include thousands of absorbed words that have gone through the official selection process (Syifani, Azzurra, Rialni, & Arini, 2025). Thus, this digital platform is the most important and official reference for those who want to understand the Indonesian language and use it as a means of communication (Purba & Aritonang, 2024). This allows research to capture the reality of the Indonesian language that is much more representative, actual, and valid for the current generation of speakers, while providing a strong data foundation for the analysis of changes in meaning that occur factually (Shar, Amur, & Ujan, 2025).

The novelty offered in this study lies in the application of a historical semantic approach that confronts definitive data from KBBI Online directly with classical Arabic authoritative dictionaries such as *Lisān al-'Arab*. By employing KBBI Online as the primary data source, a dynamic digital lexicography platform that is periodically updated, this research bridges that gap while offering novelty through a historical semantic approach that juxtaposes formal definitions in KBBI Online with etymological meanings found in classical Arabic dictionaries, namely *Lisān al-'Arab*. By comparing the original etymology that includes ancient root words with contemporary definitions in the Indonesian national dictionary, this study was able to map the pattern of meaning shifts more precisely and in depth. The scientific value of this study lies in its disclosure of the fact that the Indonesian language does not just borrow words passively, but also carries out an active process of negotiation of meaning, which reflects the cognitive adaptation and cultural uniqueness of the Indonesian people in absorbing foreign elements intelligently.

Through this systematic analysis, it is hoped that the dominant patterns in the shift in the lexical meaning of Arabic will be revealed in the midst of an increasingly modern and dynamic Indonesian society. Do people tend to specialize in Arabic terms to focus more on the religious-spiritual realm, or do they have a phenomenon of semantic secularization through the expansion of meanings that bring these terms into a broader social context? The findings of this study are expected to be an important theoretical contribution to the development of linguistics in Indonesia, especially in enriching the study of language contact, lexicography, and sociolinguistics in the context of relations between the Arab world and the archipelago.

Based on all the background descriptions and critical reviews of the previous research above, this study explicitly aims to identify and classify Arabic absorption vocabulary that experiences the phenomenon of narrowing and expanding lexical meanings in KBBI Online accurately. In addition, the research aims not only to accurately identify and classify Arabic loanwords that undergo semantic narrowing and expansion, but also to describe the sociolinguistic and historical factors underlying these meaning shifts. At a broader level, the findings of this study are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of linguistics in Indonesia while simultaneously reinforcing the concept of the nation's semantic independence namely, the capacity of the Indonesian language to actively and creatively renegotiate the meanings of loanwords in accordance with the evolving communicative needs, cultural identity, and social realities of Indonesian society amidst the currents of globalization. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide a complete picture of how Arabic is transformed semantically in the Indonesian language system that continues to develop according to the demands of the times and the communication needs of the global community.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-comparative method (Alhamdi, Hadi, & Firdaus, 2025). Researchers apply historical semantic analysis as a branch of linguistics that examines the dynamics of changing the meaning of a word over a certain period of time. This analysis was used to track changes in the meaning of Arabic words in Indonesian through cross-dictionary comparisons (*Cross-Dictionary Analysis*). The design of this research is a library research with a diachronic research model. Research is conducted in a non-experimental manner where the subject (word) is observed naturally in its lexical environment. The research design involves a comparison between the origin meaning (Source Language/BSu) and the absorption meaning (Target Language/BSa) to determine the direction of the semantic shift.

Data Sources and Research Materials

The data in this study are Indonesian vocabulary derived from the absorption of Arabic. The participants or subjects of the research in this lexicography context are lexical units (words) listed in the following authoritative sources: Primary Data and Secondary Data. Primary Data is the latest version of the Indonesian Language Dictionary (KBBI) managed by the Language Development and Fostering Agency, i.e., the October 2025 update, which added 3,259 new entries, bringing the total to 210,595 entries, as part of the regular biennial update cycle (April and October). These sources are used to identify the contemporary (synchronous) meaning and current state of use of the word.

Meanwhile, Comparative Data (Etimon): Ibn Manzur's *Lisān al-'Arab* Dictionary as the main reference for classical Arabic. This dictionary was chosen due to its authoritative status in documenting root forms and original (diachronic) meanings prior to language contact with Indonesian. The edition used in this study is the Būlāq edition printed at Al-Mirīyah, Egypt, in 1883.

Technical Data Collection

The sampling procedure employs a purposive sampling technique guided by three primary inclusion criteria. First, etymological verification requires that each word be officially recognized as originating from Arabic, as indicated by the label "Ar" in KBBI Daring (October 2025 update). Second, to ensure relevance to modern Indonesian speakers, a word must be considered "actively used in contemporary communication" by meeting at least one of two operational criteria: Criterion A (Formal/Lexicographic) stipulates that the word must appear in KBBI Daring without a "klasik" (classical/archaic) or "cakapan" (colloquial) usage label, thereby confirming its status as part of the standard modern lexicon; alternatively, Criterion B (Digital/Media Presence) accepts words that have appeared within the last five years (2021–2026) in at least one digital public domain, such as Indonesian online news portals (e.g., Kompas, Detik, Tempo) or high-frequency posts on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok) as indexed by the Indonesian Social Media Corpus. Third, the semantic differential criterion demands that each word exhibit a discernible difference in the scope of meaning between its definition in *Lisān al-'Arab* (Al-Mirīyah Press, Būlāq edition, Egypt, 1883) and those in KBBI Daring.

The data collection steps include; The data collection procedure comprises three main stages: first, data mining, which involves inventorying Arabic absorption words in KBBI Daring (October 2025 update) that bear the etymological label "Ar"; second, etymon verification, which traces the root of each word in *Lisān al-'Arab* (Būlāq edition, Al-Mirīyah Press, Egypt, 1883) to ascertain its original meaning; this stage also applies the inclusion criteria for active usage and semantic differential to filter the sample for subsequent analysis. The third stage, Tabulation, organizes the final compiled data into a structured corpus table containing the following columns: absorption word, original meaning (BSu), current meaning (BSa), and preliminary indications of semantic change. Through this systematic procedure, the study ensures that only semantically relevant and contemporarily active loanwords are subjected to in-depth diachronic analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis in this study was conducted qualitatively, employing the diachronic comparative analysis method. This analytical framework was structured into four sequential stages. The first stage involved data reduction, during which the researcher selected vocabulary from the raw data that had undergone semantic change, specifically either expansion or narrowing. Words whose meanings remained identical between Arabic and Indonesian were deliberately excluded from further analysis.

The second stage consisted of a comparison of meanings, or mapping, wherein the original meaning (etymon) as recorded in the classical Arabic dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab* was systematically compared with the contemporary meaning documented in KBBI Online. At this stage, the researcher dissected the semantic features of both sources to identify specific points of divergence and semantic shift.

The third stage involved semantic classification, through which the compared words were grouped into two distinct categories: generalization (expansion), referring to cases where the

meaning in Indonesian had become broader or more general than its Arabic etymon; and specialization (narrowing), referring to cases where the meaning had become more limited or contextually specific.

The fourth and final stage comprised sociolinguistic interpretation, wherein the researcher explained the underlying reasons for the observed semantic shifts by attributing them to various sociolinguistic factors, such as the influence of local cultural practices, the communicative needs of modern Indonesian society, and the historical context of Islamization in the archipelago.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This study succeeded in identifying 45 lexical units of Arabic language absorption in KBBI Online that met the inclusion criteria. All of these data were then analyzed through a diachronic comparative method by comparing the meaning of etymons in *Lisān al-'Arab* (Manzur, n.d; print edition 1883) and contemporary meanings in KBBI Online. Based on the analysis of meaning features, the findings are classified into two main categories of semantic shifts: generalization and specialization.

Classification of Extended Meaning (Generalization)

Based on the data collected, it was found that as many as 16 vocabulary words (35.5%) experienced an expansion of meaning. This symptom is characterized by the scope of meaning in the Target Language (Indonesian) in the online KBBI, which becomes broader or more generic than the specific meaning in the Source Language (Arabic) in the *Lisān al-'Arabic* dictionary.

Table 1. Classification of Extended Meaning (Generalization)

No	Loanword (Arabic Origin)	Etymological Meaning (*Lisān al-'Arab*)	Contemporary Meaning (KBBI / Modern Usage)
1	*Kalbu*	*Organ hati*	*Pusat Perasaan yang murni*
2	*Berkat*	*Kebaikan ilahi (teologis).*	*Karunia; doa restu; makanan kenduri.*
3	*Ziarah*	*Mengunjungi siapa pun/apa pun.*	*Kunjungan ke makam/tempat keramat.*
4	*Akibat*	*Tumit/kesudahan yang buruk*	*Konsekuensi; peristiwa yang timbul dari peristiwa sebelumnya (netral/umum)*
5	*Ghairah*	*Cemburu (dalam hubungan).*	*Semangat; gairah; keinginan kuat.*
6	*Naskah*	*Menghapus atau menyalin teks.*	*Karangan tulis tangan; draf asli.*
7	*Kalimat*	*Kata (tunggal).*	*Rangkaian kata yang bermakna lengkap.*
8	*Hajat*	*Kebutuhan mendesak/hajat*	*Keinginan; maksud; pesta; buang*

		hidup.	*air.*
9	*Risalah*	*Surat kiriman/pesan singkat.*	*Karangan ringkas; laporan; selebaran.*
10	*Ilmu*	*Pengetahuan mendalam tentang agama*	*Pengetahuan umum tentang segala sesuatu*
11	*Waktu*	*Masa tertentu (terbatas)*	*Keseluruhan tentang masa (tidak terbatas)*
12	*Sebab*	*Tali atau perantara.*	*Hal yang menjadikan timbulnya sesuatu.*
13	*Rakyat*	*Gembalaan/rakyat di bawah raja.*	*Penduduk suatu negara/orang banyak.*
14	*Hikmah*	*Kebijaksanaan kenabian.*	*Makna dalam; manfaat; kegunaan.*
15	*Sabar*	*Menahan diri (umum).*	*Tabah hati; tidak lekas marah/putus asa.*
16	*Kursi*	*Tempat duduk*	*Jabatan/kedudukan, posisi dalam struktur*

Classification of Narrowed Meaning (Specialization)

The data showed dominance in the category of narrowing meaning, which was as many as 29 vocabulary words (64.5%). This phenomenon indicates that the original meaning that is general in Arabic has been condensed into a very specific term in the context of use in Indonesia, especially in the religious and technical realms.

Table 2. Classification of Narrowed Meaning (Specialization)

No	Loanword (Arabic Origin)	Etymological Meaning (*Lisān al-ʻArab*)	Contemporary Meaning (KBBI / Modern Usage)
1	*Ustadz*	*Guru/pakar bidang apa pun.*	*Guru agama Islam/pendakwah.*
2	*Kitab*	*Segala jenis tulisan/buku.*	*Buku suci/wahyu Tuhan.*
3	*Mimbar*	*Tempat tinggi/tangga.*	*Panggung khotbah di masjid.*
4	*Majelis*	*Tempat duduk (umum).*	*Lembaga; dewan; pertemuan resmi.*
5	*Alamat*	*Tanda/sinyal alam.*	*Domisili/tanda tempat tinggal.*
6	*Madrasah*	*Tempat belajar/sekolah secara umum*	*Sekolah yang berdasarkan agama*
7	*Fardhu*	*Ketentuan/potongan.*	*Kewajiban agama (ibadah).*
8	*Ulama*	*Orang-orang yang berilmu (ilmu apa saja)*	*Orang yang ahli dalam pengetahuan agama Islam.*
9	*Munafik*	*Berpindah (seperti lubang tikus).*	*Berpura-pura percaya; tidak jujur.*
10	*Khadam*	*Pelayan/orang yang*	*Pelayan (konteks gaib/mistis).*

		membantu.	
11	*Amal*	*Pekerjaan/perbuatan apa pun.*	*Perbuatan baik; derma; sedekah.*
12	*Ibadah*	*Tunduk/merendahkan diri.*	*Bakti kepada Tuhan (ritual resmi).*
13	*Jamaah*	*Kelompok orang (umum).*	*Kumpulan orang beribadah bersama.*
14	*Fitnah*	*Ujian/cobaan/pencobaan logam.*	*Perkataan bohong untuk menjatuhkan.*
15	*Aurat*	*Celah/kekurangan/hal memalukan.*	*Bagian tubuh yang wajib ditutup.*
16	*Syahid*	*Saksi (yang melihat).*	*Orang yang mati demi membela agama.*
17	*Nasib*	*Bagian/jatah.*	*Takdir; keberuntungan; keadaan diri.*
18	*Ilmu*	*Pengetahuan/persepsi.*	*Pengetahuan yang sistematis/akademik.*
19	*Alim*	*Orang yang berpengetahuan (umum)*	*Orang yang berpengetahuan dalam hal agama Islam*
20	*Kiamat*	*Berdiri/bangkit.*	*Hari kehancuran dunia.*
21	*Murtad*	*Kembali/berbalik arah.*	*Keluar dari agama Islam.*
22	*Syarif*	*Orang yang mulia (umum).*	*Keturunan Nabi Muhammad SAW.*
23	*Wahyu*	*Isyarat/bisikan/pesan cepat.*	*Petunjuk Tuhan kepada Nabi.*
24	*Doa*	*Seruan/panggilan.*	*Permohonan kepada Tuhan.*
25	*Zakat*	*Tumbuh/suci/bersih.*	*Derma wajib (rukun Islam).*
26	*Umrah*	*Kunjungan/ziarah (umum).*	*Ziarah ke Kakbah (haji kecil).*
27	*Aqidah*	*Simpulan/ikatan tali.*	*Keyakinan dasar dalam agama.*
28	*Fatwa*	*Jawaban atas pertanyaan.*	*Keputusan hukum agama (dari Mufti).*
29	*Kufur*	*Menutup sesuatu (umum).*	*Ingkar kepada Tuhan; tidak beriman.*

3.2 Discussion

The Dynamics of Meaning Expansion: Desacralization and Generalization

Data shows that some Arabic terms that were initially technical or had specific connotations have undergone generalizations of speech/word expansion, or in Arabic, called *Tausi' al-Makna* (Jannah et al., 2025). For example, the word "*Akibat*". In *Lisān al-'Arab*, the etymon *'aqiba* is often associated with "heel" or "bad end" (*su'ul 'aqibah*). However, in KBBI

Online, the meaning of "*Akibat*" has expanded to be neutral; It can refer to the outcome of any cause, whether positive or negative.

Similarly, the word "*Berkat*" (from Arabic *barakah*) has undergone significant expansion. In its original Arabic context, *barakah* carries a deeply theological meaning: divine goodness, blessing, or spiritual grace that descends from God. However, in Indonesian usage, "*Berkat*" has expanded considerably to encompass: "*karunia*" (gift/grace), "doa restu" (prayer/blessing), and even "*makanan kenduri*" (communal feast food). This expansion reflects how Indonesian speakers have reinterpreted a sacred theological concept to cover both spiritual and social domains (Julul, Rahmawati, Kwary, & Sartini, 2019). The word is now used in everyday contexts ranging from religious ceremonies to mundane expressions of gratitude for ordinary good fortune. This semantic broadening demonstrates how Indonesian society has localized the concept of divine blessing, extending it from purely theological discourse into social and cultural practices such as the Javanese *slametan* tradition, where "*berkat*" is understood as both spiritual grace and the material food shared during communal gatherings (Puspita & Yusuf, 2020).

Another compelling example is "*ziarah*" (from Arabic *ziyarah*), which in classical Arabic means "to visit" anyone or anything, whether a person, a place, or a community. In Indonesian, however, "*ziarah*" has undergone a notable expansion in a different direction. At the same time, its core meaning of "visiting" remains; the term has been generalized to specifically encompass visits to graves, sacred tombs, or holy places (*ziarah kubur* or *ziarah wali*). In Arabic, the verb *zāra* can apply to any social visit, including visiting friends, family, or neighbors. In Indonesian, the term has become almost exclusively associated with religious or spiritual pilgrimages, especially to the graves of ancestors, saints (*wali*), or significant Islamic figures. This semantic shift reflects the strong influence of Javanese and Sundanese ancestral veneration traditions, where visiting graves is a deeply ingrained cultural practice that was later Islamized through the use of Arabic vocabulary. The expansion here is not merely quantitative (covering more referents). However, the term has absorbed qualitative cultural and spiritual connotations that extend beyond its original Arabic semantic range, demonstrating how Indonesian speakers have repurposed Arabic loanwords to accommodate local spiritual practices.

This phenomenon reflects the communication needs of Indonesian society, which requires abstract terms to explain causal relationships in various non-religious contexts. This expansion is a form of cognitive adaptation in which Indonesian speakers use Arabic sound structures for generalist concepts in daily life. This shows that Arabic has made a significant contribution to the vocabulary of Indonesian (Izza, 2024). This change reflects a process of desacralization, in which terms that were originally loaded with religious or technical religious content are drawn into the profane (general) realm.

Cognitively, Indonesian speakers borrow Arabic sound structures not just as an act of imitation, but as a form of functional adaptation. The use of the word "Effect" to refer to both positive and negative outcomes suggests that society has integrated such structures into generalist thinking schemes. This absorption proves that the Indonesian language is very adaptive in formulating universal concepts through the reinterpretation of foreign language elements (Alifiansyah, Irawan, & Hasan, 2023).

The Dynamics of Narrowing of Meaning: Specialization and Sacredization

Etymologically, the word *Ulama* is the plural form of *Alim*, which generically means "knowledgeable person" or scientist in any field. However, in the Indonesian linguistic landscape, there has been a significant narrowing of meaning. This term no longer refers to the authority holder of general science, but rather to a specialization that is only pinned on individuals who have deep expertise in Islamic law and theology. In this perspective, the knowledge possessed by *Ulama* not only broadens insight but also deepens a sense of submission to God (Ibrahim, Sohrah, & Rosmini, 2026).

Several interrelated factors drive this sharp narrowing in Indonesia. First, the historical context of Islamization in the archipelago: Arabic was introduced primarily through *da'wah* (missionary activities) and religious literature, not through academic or scientific exchange, creating an immediate and strong association between Arabic vocabulary and Islamic religious discourse (Astuti & Pranowo, 2025). Second, the institutionalization of the term occurred through the establishment of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in 1975, which legally and officially restricted who could be called an "*ulama*" to those with deep expertise in Islamic law and theology. Third, unlike in the Middle East where *'ālim* could refer to any scientist, Indonesian society collectively identified this sound structure as a "sacred language," leading to the term being collectively maintained within the religious corridor to preserve its spiritual identity.

Likewise with "*Madrasah*", the term madrasah actually refers to a school that carries out education in general. However, in Indonesia, the word madrasah is specifically used to denote a school that is Islamic-style and teaches more religious knowledge (Abdurrohman & Nursikin, 2023). This narrowing phenomenon is triggered by socio-cultural factors related to the entry of Islam into the archipelago. Given that Arabic was introduced massively through da'wah and religious literature, local communities collectively identified the sound structure of Arabic as a "sacred language" or "religious language". This perception creates a cognitive limitation in which the absorbed vocabulary tends to be maintained within the religious corridor in order to maintain its spiritual identity (Astuti & Pranowo, 2025).

As a response, the emergence of the "*Madrasah*" in the late nineteenth century was deliberately designed as an Islamic alternative to Dutch secular education, teaching both religious and secular subjects but with a distinct Islamic character. This institutional distinction was further reinforced by post-independence policies that created separate ministries: the Ministry of Religion overseeing madrasahs and the Ministry of Education managing public schools, formally institutionalizing the binary separation. Thus, the narrowing of "*madrasah*" reflects a strategic social construction where Indonesian Muslims created an educational institution that was structurally similar to colonial schools but symbolically and substantively Islamic. This deliberate reduction to the religious corridor demonstrates that language absorption is not merely a matter of word transfer but also a matter of identity formation and negotiation with colonial power structures.

This narrowing of meaning is a deliberate form of reduction by the speaker ecosystem to give greater weight to sacredness and legitimacy. This shows that the process of language

absorption is not only a matter of word transfer, but also a matter of value labeling that emphasizes the boundary between the profane and the sacred.

Sociolinguistic Factors and the Influence of Digitalization

In line with the findings of this study, the use of KBBI Online reveals that modernization and globalization are accelerating this shift in meaning. Digital platforms record how words such as "Blessing", which has Arabic roots, have now completely detached from the etymological meaning of "*divine* gift" into a very broad expression of grace that is interpreted as "gift; the rest of the prayer; feast food". The fact that KBBI Online continues to update its definition shows that Indonesian is a living organism.

This kind of adaptation process, both through expansion and narrowing of meaning, represents the linguistic intelligence of Indonesian speakers. Speakers not only passively absorb foreign elements, but process them in such a way that they are relevant to local communication needs without losing their original identity (Aziz et al., 2023). The ability to reconstruct the meaning of the word absorption shows the existence of semantic independence in the Indonesian language ecosystem amid the influence of massive globalization.

Theoretically, this phenomenon reinforces the historical semantic principle that changes in the socio-ecological context will automatically overhaul the semantic structure of a word (Abas, Sahad, & Abusahyon, 2021). The predominantly agrarian, urban, and mercantile societies of the Arab world, where many classical Islamic legal and intellectual traditions were formalized in cosmopolitan centers such as Mecca, Medina, Damascus, and Baghdad, and the agrarian-maritime communities of the archipelago require a drastic adjustment of meaning. Words that originally had specific references to desert life or certain laws are now reinterpreted to be in harmony with the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society's thought, topography, and social structure.

However, the semantic flexibility of Arabic allows for the adaptation of meanings such as expansion, narrowing, or shifting of meaning without losing the core structure and basic essence of the original language (Evans, 2025). In other words, despite the dynamic change in meaning, the semantic flexibility of Arabic loanwords in Indonesian demonstrates the cognitive intelligence and elasticity of Indonesian as the target language in adapting foreign lexical items to serve the communicative needs of its speakers (Sugito & Suparmi, 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the semantic transformation of Arabic loanwords in Indonesia is dominated by specialization (64.5%), signifying a robust terminological narrowing that consolidates the referential precision of terms within specific discourse domains, particularly the religious sphere. Conversely, generalization (35.5%) highlights a pragmatic semantic broadening that facilitates wider application across secular and multifunctional communicative contexts. By successfully identifying and classifying these shifts through a diachronic lens, this research provides a vital scientific justification for Indonesia’s "semantic independence." It proves that the Indonesian linguistic ecosystem does not merely adopt foreign elements passively but actively reconstructs them to harmonize with the archipelago's

pluralistic social cognition and modern communication demands without completely losing its original phonological traces. This work contributes to the current state of knowledge by leveraging authoritative digital platforms like KBBI Online as an updated data source, while maintaining a diachronic-comparative framework that juxtaposes classical etymological references with contemporary lexical definitions, thereby offering a more current reflection of semantic shifts within a two-point temporal comparison.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, these findings offer practical benefits for language policy developers and dictionary compilers. For dictionary compilers, the documented patterns of specialization and generalization provide empirical guidance for updating definitions and usage labels, ensuring that entries accurately reflect contemporary meanings; for instance, recognizing that "*Ulama*" and "*Ustadz*" now carry restricted religious connotations rather than their original broader senses. For language policymakers at the Agency for Language Development and Cultivation, this research underscores the need for periodic lexicographic reviews that account for socio-cultural dynamics driving semantic change, enabling more responsive language planning strategies. Furthermore, the identification of active semantic reconstruction offers a framework for developing consistent loanword absorption policies that balance etymological fidelity with local communicative needs. By adopting the diachronic-comparative methodology as a model for periodic meaning audits, compilers can produce more accurate and dynamic dictionaries that serve both as linguistic references and cultural archives.

While this research illuminates the survival mechanisms of local cultural identity, it remains focused on comparative dictionary data. Consequently, future research should utilize Corpus Linguistics to track the real-time frequency and pragmatic shifts of these terms within social media and digital news outlets. Ongoing extensions of this work could also explore Pragmatic-Diachronic frameworks to observe how these semantic transformations influence social interaction patterns and speech acts in the emerging landscape of digital communication.

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