

The Evolution of Religious Discourse in Contemporary Islam: A Linguistic-Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract. This research examines the relationship between words and it's meaning in religious terms and their impact on the formation of social identity, based on Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games theory. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing literature review and social discourse analysis of religious terms within the social context of Indonesian society. Terms such as hijrah, jihad, sharia, kafir, and bid'ah are analyzed to understand how their meanings shift and evolve over time. The findings reveal that the meanings of these terms are dynamic and heavily influenced by social contexts and usage within the community, playing a significant role in shaping and reinforcing the social identity of specific groups. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding religious terms within a broader socio-cultural framework, where language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a dynamic instrument for shaping social identity. By demonstrating how the shifting meanings of religious terms influence group boundaries and social interactions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of religious discourse and its role in the negotiation of identity within Indonesian society

Keywords: *word, meaning, religious discourse, language game, contemporary Islam*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a crucial instrument in shaping social identity, functioning both as a communication tool and a marker of group belonging. In multicultural societies, language influences cultural and political identities, shaping social dynamics through interaction and framing (Van Yusat & Setiawan, 2022). Religious terms, in particular, serve as identity symbols that can foster cohesion or create social divisions (Setyawan & Nugroho, 2021).

Religious education that embraces multiculturalism helps students navigate diversity and strengthens their social identity (Misbah et al., 2021). Similarly, language plays a vital role in fostering national unity amid globalization (Triguna, 2019). Learning foreign languages, such as Japanese, helps Indonesian students negotiate their identities as both Muslims and Indonesians, demonstrating language's role as a bridge in cross-cultural interactions (Yulianti & Visiaty, 2018).

Religious terms shape group identity, either fostering social cohesion or reinforcing divisions (Setyawan & Nugroho, 2021). Through the use of appropriate terms, both groups can establish better communication and reduce tensions that may arise from differences in beliefs. At Sriwijaya University, Papuan and non-Papuan students used religious terms to ease tensions and foster dialogue, demonstrating their role in building social harmony (Yolanda et al., 2021). In this context, religious terms can serve as a means to create solidarity among different groups, strengthen collective identity, and facilitate intercultural dialog.

Religious terms, when framed rigidly, can reinforce exclusivist boundaries and contribute to group polarization. For example, in a broader context, terms used in religious discussions can create strict identity boundaries, which in turn can reinforce differences between groups. Therefore, a deep understanding of the social and cultural context in which such terms are used is essential to avoid conflict and promote harmony.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's "language games" theory explains how language meaning is shaped by its social context rather than being fixed. In Wittgenstein's view, the meaning of a word or expression is determined by the way and context in which it is used, not by a rigid or essential definition (Kadir, 2019). Wittgenstein argues that every use of language is part of a "form of life", which includes broader social norms, customs, and practices. Thus, Religious terms gain meaning through discourse and social interaction rather than fixed definitions (Idjakpo & Ottuh, 2020; Ottuh & Idjakpo, 2020).

Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, particularly on the concept of language games, offers insights into social identity formation and religious practices. Wittgenstein argued that language is an integral part of human life, used for daily interactions and religious practices (Nole, 2023). His theory suggests that language transcends and encompasses both mind and reality, serving as the primary link between the two (Basuki, 2023). Wittgenstein's ideas have been applied to analyze Indonesia's pluralistic society, emphasizing the importance of recognizing diverse language games in the unity of the nation (Wangge & Wijanarko, 2023). While existing studies have applied Wittgenstein's theory to pragmatics and national unity, little research has specifically examined how religious terms shape social identity within

Indonesian society. This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the evolving meanings of key religious terms and their role in social identity formation.

Furthermore, the concept of language games also implies that there is no one right way to use language. Instead, Wittgenstein emphasizes the plurality of language use, which reflects the diversity of human experience. In this context, the understanding of religious or other terms may vary depending on an individual's cultural and social background (Fang, 2024). Therefore, a Wittgensteinian approach to language offers a way to understand how meanings are formed and maintained in different social contexts.

In application, the concept of language games can be used to analyze various social phenomena, including intercultural interaction and interreligious dialogue. For example, in the context of interfaith dialog, an understanding of how religious terms are used in the practice of each religion can help build bridges of communication and reduce misunderstandings (Idjakpo & Ottuh, 2020; Kadir, 2019). Thus, Wittgenstein provides a useful framework for understanding the complexity of language and meaning in diverse social contexts.

In social discourse analysis, a Wittgensteinian approach can be used to explore how religious terms are shaped and maintained in a broader social context. Questions can serve as a tool to bridge everyday language and scientific language, which is relevant in understanding how religious terms are used in public discourse (Hsu, 2007). Thus, discourse analysis can help reveal how the meaning of religious terms is constructed through social interactions and cultural practices. Furthermore, religious practices become a recurring interaction among individuals and groups. In this context, religious terms serve not only as symbols of identity but also as tools to construct collective meanings within communities (Hipólito & Hesp, 2022). By using Wittgenstein's approach, we can understand how religious terms function in complex and diverse social contexts in Indonesia.

This research focuses on two main questions: 1) How do religious terms function within the framework of social language games to shape social identity?, 2) How does the dynamic interaction between language use and meaning formation influence group boundaries and identity negotiation?

This study examines how religious terms shape social identity by reflecting values, beliefs, and group positions. In various situations, the use of religious language becomes a symbol that shows ideological affiliation and strengthens community ties. By examining the shifting meanings of key religious terms within Indonesian society, this study contributes to the understanding of how religious discourse both reflects and influences social identity formation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies Ludwig Wittgenstein's language games theory to analyze the use and shifting meanings of selected religious terms in Indonesia. Wittgenstein's theory suggests that the meaning of words emerges from their usage in social interactions, making it an appropriate framework for examining how religious discourse shapes and reflects social identity (Fadhilah, 2024; Susanti et al., 2021). The study focuses on the analysis of five religious terms: *hijrah*, *jihad*, *sharia*, *kafir*, and *bid'ah*. These terms were selected based on their frequent usage in religious

discourse and their potential to influence social identity construction. The selection criteria include: (1) high frequency in contemporary religious discussions, both in scholarly and public discourse; (2) potential for semantic shifts depending on socio-political and cultural contexts; and (3) relevance to identity negotiation and group boundary formation.

These terms are analyzed using Wittgenstein's theory of language games, particularly as outlined in *Philosophical Investigations*. The analysis examines how meanings emerge through use in different social contexts and how these meanings contribute to identity formation and intergroup relations. To achieve this, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Norman Fairclough. This method is used to investigate the interplay between language, power, and ideology in religious discourse. Fairclough's framework consists of three analytical dimensions: (1) textual analysis – examining word choices, framing, and semantic shifts of selected religious terms; (2) discourse practice – analyzing how these terms are used, interpreted, and reproduced in different social contexts, including media and religious discourse; and (3) socio-cultural analysis – understanding how broader social, historical, and political factors influence the evolution of these terms and their impact on identity construction (Jia, 2023; Weissenrieder & Fairclough, 1997).

Data for this study are collected through three main methods: (1) literature review – analyzing existing works on religious discourse, Wittgenstein's philosophy, and social identity formation; (2) corpus analysis – examining religious terms in digital media, including social media posts, public discussion forums, and religious sermons; and (3) contextual observation – identifying recurring patterns in the use of selected terms in different social settings. The analysis follows a step-by-step process: (1) identifying dominant meanings of selected religious terms in various discourse contexts; (2) examining variations in meaning and their correlation with socio-political contexts; (3) applying Wittgenstein's language game theory to explain how these meanings shift and interact with identity construction; and (4) interpreting the broader implications for intergroup relations and religious discourse in Indonesia.

While this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of religious terms using Wittgenstein's framework, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies on publicly available discourse, which may not fully capture private or informal uses of religious terms. Second, researcher bias in interpreting discourse is an inherent challenge in qualitative analysis. To mitigate this, multiple sources and cross-referencing techniques are employed to ensure balanced interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Some of the words discussed in this research strongly connect with religious terms. Even without undergoing structural changes in the form of prefixes, affixes, or inserts, these words can have several different meanings according to the context in which they are used. This shows that the social situation, location, and the speaker of the word have an influence on the process of forming the meaning of these words.

This changing condition is in accordance with the concept of *language game* promoted by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his philosophical work *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1953). This concept shows how Wittgenstein changed his perspective on language. From his initial theory in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,

where he saw language as a *picture of the world* (the *picture theory of language*), towards a more contextual and complex approach to how language is used in human communication.

Through social discourse analysis, this research seeks to understand how religious terms are shaped and maintained in a broader social context. Previous research shows that religious discourse can reflect and shape a group's social identity, as well as serve as a tool to build relationships between different groups (Misbah et al., 2021). In a multicultural society like Indonesia, where diverse religious traditions and practices exist, the sensitive and contextual use of religious terminology is crucial to building mutual understanding and tolerance (Triguna, 2019).

Religious terms can serve as a bridge for interfaith dialog. In this context, understanding how such terms are used in everyday practice can help reduce misunderstanding and conflict. Using a Wittgensteinian approach, we hope to uncover the dynamics of language use in religious contexts and how religious terms can serve as a tool to build identity and strengthen intergroup relations (Yulianti & Visiaty, 2018).

The following are some of the words that are the focus of this research:

Table 1. List of meanings of religious terms based on lexical meaning and its comparison in contemporary meaning

No.	Words	Original meaning	Contemporary meaning
1	Hijrah	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The movement of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH along with some of his followers from Makkah to Medina to save themselves and so on from the pressure of the infidel Quraysh. 2. Temporarily moving or removing from one place to another better place for a specific reason (safety, goodness, etc.) 3. Change (attitude, behavior, etc.) for the better 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Media: Hijrah signifies true piety, urging followers to leave secular lifestyles. 2. Politics: Used to promote stricter Islamic values and divide “Islamists” from “secularists.” 3. Economy: Hijrah branding creates exclusive Islamic alternatives in finance and lifestyle.
2	Jihad	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effort with all efforts to achieve good 2. Earnest efforts to defend the religion of Islam by sacrificing property, body, and soul. 3. Holy war against infidels to defend the religion of Islam under certain conditions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In Western media, <i>jihad</i> is often linked to terrorism, reinforcing negative stereotypes. 2. In Indonesian politics, conservatives use <i>jihad</i> to promote moral struggles, like in the 212 movement. 3. On social media, the hijrah movement redefines <i>jihad</i> as

			personal struggle against materialism.
3	Syariah	Religious law that stipulates the rules of human life, human relations with Allah, human relations with humans and the surrounding environment based on the Qur'an and hadith.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In political rhetoric, conservatives use <i>sharia</i> as moral authority, while progressives critique it as social control. 2. In Western media, <i>sharia</i> is linked to rigid laws and extremism, shaping negative views of Islam. 3. On social media, influencers promote <i>sharia</i> as part of modern consumer culture, marketing compliant products and lifestyles.
4	Kafir	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The one who disobeys 2. One who does not believe in Allah SWT and His messenger 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Politics: Hardliners use <i>kafir</i> to delegitimize opponents and enforce boundaries. 2. Media: Western narratives link <i>kafir</i> to extremism, shaping non-Muslim views. 3. Social Media: Influencers weaponize <i>kafir</i> to silence critics and gain support.
5	Bid'ah	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actions or methods that were never said or modeled by the Prophet or his companions, then carried out as if they were Islamic teachings. 2. The renewal of Islamic teachings without reference to authoritative sources, such as the Qur'an, hadith, consensus, and kias (interpretation). 3. Lies; deceit 4. teachings or views that are contrary to the church 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In conservative societies, most religious innovations are rejected as <i>bid'ah</i>. 2. In progressive communities, <i>bid'ah</i> is seen more flexibly, allowing for modern adaptations.

Some of the words above have their original meanings listed in the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) or other standard dictionaries. However, in dynamic social interactions, these words often undergo significant shifts in meaning. In various social contexts, the original meanings of these words can narrow, becoming

more specific to certain groups, or even widening, bringing new connotations far from their basic meanings. In detail, the words above can be discussed as follows:

1. Hijrah

The word *hijrah* originally refers to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH from Makkah to Medina. This meaning is closely associated with the Prophet's movement and is commonly used in historical and religious contexts. In the Qur'an, *hijrah* also carries this meaning, as seen in Surah Al-Hasyr verse 8 (LPMQ, 2022):

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأَمْوَالِهِمْ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا وَيَنْصُرُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

Meaning:

(The booty is also) for the poor who migrate, those who are expelled from their homes and (leave) their possessions to seek the bounty of Allah, His pleasure, and (to) help (the religion) of Allah and His Messenger. They are the righteous ones.

In contemporary discourse, *hijrah* has undergone a semantic shift, acquiring a new meaning beyond its historical and religious roots. In modern Indonesian, *hijrah* often signifies a personal transformation towards a more religious lifestyle, as reflected in phrases like:

"Be patient with all the abuse and insults when you are in the process of *hijrah*."

"*Hijrah* is not just about changing appearance but also about internal transformation."

The shift in meaning reflects Wittgenstein's concept of language games, where words acquire meaning based on their usage within specific social and cultural contexts. In some communities, *hijrah* is associated with joining specific religious movements or groups. For instance, the Instagram account *Teman Hijrah Indonesia* (@temanhijrah_) implicitly signals a particular ideological affiliation. This exclusivization of the term aligns with how language constructs social identity, as also discussed in NU Online (Syakir, 2021).

The changing meaning of *hijrah* can be understood through Ludwig Wittgenstein's language game theory, which suggests that words derive their meaning from their use in specific social contexts. In one "language game," *hijrah* strictly refers to the Prophet's migration, but in another, it signifies personal religious transformation.

For comparison, terms like "faith" or "tolerance" also shift in meaning depending on their usage. In interfaith discussions, "faith" may mean recognizing the legitimacy of diverse religious beliefs, while in an internal Islamic context, it might refer to deep personal conviction. (Al-Madani, 2020).

Applying this to *hijrah*, its meaning has evolved beyond the Prophet's historical migration. Now, the term is shaped by socio-cultural and ideological contexts, reflecting diverse interpretations within contemporary discourse. Thus, the contemporary meaning of *hijrah* is shaped not by intrinsic linguistic properties but by

evolving social, cultural, and ideological dynamics. Unlike its original meaning in the time of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, today's *hijrah* is a fluid concept influenced by modern religious narratives, media, and identity politics.

2. Jihad

In Indonesian Muslim society, the term *jihad* has become particularly sensitive, especially following global political events such as the Arab Spring. In this context, some individuals have interpreted *jihad* as an obligation to engage in armed conflict. However, this interpretation represents only one of many meanings that have evolved within Islamic discourse.

Etymologically, *jihad* originates from the Arabic root ج-ه-د, meaning effort or struggle. In classical Islamic literature, *jihad* encompasses various dimensions, including spiritual struggle (*mujahadah*), intellectual effort in establishing Islamic law (*ijtihad*), and armed resistance under specific circumstances. The Qur'an refers to *jihad* in multiple contexts, one of which is defined by the *Mu'jam Al-Wasith*:

"qitâlu man laisa lahu dhimmatun min al-kuffâr"

(The struggle against disbelievers who are not bound by a peace treaty).

However, in modern discourse, the meaning of *jihad* has often been reduced to mere warfare or violence. [Azyumardi Azra \(2019\)](#) notes that many Western observers equate *jihad* with Muslim military invasions of various regions. This perception has been reinforced by extremist groups that use the term *jihad* to justify acts of terrorism ([Samudra, 2004](#)).

Wittgenstein's concept of *language games* provides a valuable framework for analyzing how the meaning of *jihad* is shaped and contested in different social and political contexts. In moderate Islamic traditions, *jihad* is understood as an effort for self-improvement and the pursuit of social justice. Conversely, in extremist discourse, the term is employed to legitimize violent actions.

This contestation of meaning is evident in various public discourses, including media and politics. For instance:

- a. In Western media, *jihad* is often reported in the context of terrorism, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Islam.
- b. In Indonesian politics, the term has been used by conservative Islamic groups to advocate moral struggles, such as in the 212 movement.
- c. In social media da'wah, *jihad* is frequently popularized by the *hijrah* movement to emphasize personal struggles against materialism and worldly temptations.

Discourse analysis suggests that the meaning of *jihad* is not fixed but is continually negotiated by various social actors. [Hédoin \(2016\)](#) argues that the use of a term in a particular discourse shapes collective understanding and social values. Thus, the debate surrounding *jihad* is not merely a linguistic issue but also a matter of identity construction within religious and political contexts.

3. Syariah (sharia)

The word sharia (شريعة) in the almanya online dictionary means all the provisions of Allah for his servants in the form of Aqidah or law. This meaning is also

adopted into Indonesian, which is related to rules or laws based on religion (Kemdikbud, 2023). More broadly, sharia not only includes rules of worship, but also covers aspects of daily life such as economics, marriage, inheritance, muamalah (social interaction), and political and government affairs. The principles of sharia are taken from 4 main sources: Al-Quran, Sunnah, Ijma', and Qiyas.

The Qur'anic reference to *sharia* appears in Surah Al-Jatsiyah (45:18) (LPMQ, 2022), which states:

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning:

Then, We made you (Prophet Muhammad) follow the law of that affair (religion). So, follow it and do not follow the lusts of those who do not know.

According to Al-Wahidi's *Tafsir Wajiz*, the term *sharia* in this verse refers to religious regulations, highlighting its function as a divine law established by Allah (Al Wahidi, 2011).

Over time, the term *sharia* has expanded beyond its classical legal definition. Its derivatives, such as *syar'i*, have emerged in various modern contexts, including fashion, tourism, and banking. In the context of *syar'i* fashion, for example, the word has evolved to denote a specific standard of dress that aligns with Islamic teachings on modesty, particularly for Muslim women. Initially intended to fulfill the religious requirement of covering the *aurat*, *syar'i* fashion has since become a symbol of lifestyle and religious identity.

This shift has led to social stereotyping, where those who wear *syar'i* clothing are often perceived as more devout than those who do not. In some Muslim communities, this distinction has even become a measure of religious adherence. The phenomenon of *syar'i* fashion—characterized by loose, flowing garments and oversized hijabs—has not emerged in isolation but is shaped by specific ideological influences. Thus, attributing the trend solely to increased religious awareness among Muslim women oversimplifies the issue (Ulfah & Aminuddin, 2023).

Beyond fashion, the widespread use of *sharia* in economic and social spheres further illustrates how language constructs social identity. For example, in the financial sector, “sharia banking” is framed as a more ethical alternative to conventional banking, reinforcing the notion that religiously compliant financial practices are superior. Similarly, the term “sharia tourism” is used to cater to Muslim travelers seeking destinations aligned with Islamic values. These applications not only reshape the term's meaning but also create implicit social divisions, where adherence to *sharia* principles is associated with greater religious commitment, while deviation from these norms may be viewed as lesser piety.

Wittgenstein's theory of language games provides an insightful framework for understanding how *sharia* and its derivatives acquire different meanings across social contexts. He argues that words derive meaning from their use within specific social interactions, rather than possessing fixed definitions. When the term *sharia* is applied beyond religious law—such as in fashion or finance—it enters new language games, altering its original meaning and reinforcing or challenging social identities.

This dynamic is particularly evident in contemporary media and political discourse, where different groups contest the meaning of *sharia*. For instance:

- a. In political rhetoric, conservative Islamic groups in Indonesia often invoke *sharia* as a symbol of moral and legal authority, while progressive groups may critique its use as a tool for social control.
- b. In Western media, *sharia* is frequently associated with rigid legal systems or extremist ideologies, shaping negative perceptions of Islam.
- c. On social media, influencers and religious figures actively redefine *sharia* to align with modern consumer culture, promoting *sharia-compliant* products and lifestyles as aspirational ideals.

These competing narratives illustrate how language both reflects and constructs power dynamics within society. By framing certain behaviors as “more *sharia-compliant*,” dominant groups shape societal norms and influence individual choices, often reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between “authentic” and “less authentic” religious practices.

4. Kafir

The word *kafir* (كَافِر), etymologically, comes from the Arabic word meaning “to reject” or “to deny.” In the context of Islam, the term is traditionally used to refer to someone who rejects or does not believe in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad’s message. The Qur’an describes the meaning of *kafir* in several verses, including Surah Al-Kafirun 1-6 and Surah Al-Baqarah 2:6:

The Koran describes the meaning of *kafir* in several verses, including Surah al-Kafirun 1-6 (LPMQ, 2022), which states:

"Say: O disbelievers, I will not worship what you worship, and you do not worship the God I worship.... For you your religion, and for me mine."

And Surah al-Baqarah verse 6 which reads:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Meaning:

Indeed, those who disbelieve are the same as them; whether you warn them or not, they will not believe.

The Indonesian dictionary defines *kafir* as someone who denies and does not believe in Allah (Kemdikbud, 2023). Theologically, it refers to non-Muslims (Wati & Buduroh, 2021), but its meaning has evolved beyond religious classification into a social and ideological construct shaped by historical and political contexts.

Initially, *kafir* denoted those outside Islam, but its usage has narrowed, often serving as a tool for exclusion. In modern discourse, it is frequently employed to delegitimize opponents—whether religious, political, or ideological—rather than simply indicate non-Muslims.

Sufi scholar Prof. Dr. Abdul Hadi WM warns that the term’s increasing negative connotations threaten social harmony (MELACAK AKAR SEJARAH KATA KAFIR DI INDONESIA? (2), 2019). Similarly, John L. Esposito (2010) argues that in political

rhetoric, *kafir* is used to construct an “us vs. them” narrative, justifying marginalization and discrimination. This is evident in various contexts:

- a. Politics: Hardline groups use *kafir* to delegitimize opponents and reinforce ideological boundaries.
- b. Media: Western narratives often associate *kafir* with extremism, shaping perceptions among non-Muslims.
- c. Social Media: Religious influencers strategically employ the term to silence critics or gain support, fueling polarization.

Wittgenstein’s language game theory explains how *kafir* acquires meaning through social interaction rather than holding an absolute definition. [Kopytko \(2007\)](#) emphasizes that language is shaped by its use within communities, and in this case, *kafir* functions as both a theological term and a socio-political instrument.

In Indonesia, [Rahmatullah \(2022\)](#) highlights *kafir* as a contested term in debates on pluralism and religious tolerance. Originally a theological classification, it has transformed into a marker of ideological division, reflecting shifting power dynamics.

5. Bid’ah

The word *bid’ah* linguistically (etymologically) has two words of origin. First, *Al-band's* was taken from *fi'il mādhiy bada*. Second, *Al-Ibda'* which is taken from the *fi'il madhiy, abda'a*. Both words have the same meaning, which is a word that means the growth of something without a previous example, which is made up, and is a creation that previously did not exist ([Supani, 2008](#)).

In many religious discourses, *bid'ah* is often associated with actions or practices that are considered to deviate from the original teachings of Islam. Traditionalist scholars argue that anything not practiced by the Prophet Muhammad or not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah falls under the category of *bid'ah*. In a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said:

"Whoever makes up something that is not from him in our affairs, it is rejected."

- (HR. Bukhari and Muslim)

This hadith is often used by scholars to reject innovation in religious matters, as *bid'ah* is seen as a deviation from Islam’s original teachings. From this perspective, *bid'ah* is viewed as a threat to the sanctity and authenticity of Islam, especially if it introduces new religious practices not found in the Prophet's teachings.

The development of modern Islamic thought, as influenced by reformers such as Muhammad Abduh, has significantly impacted the understanding of *bid'ah*. [Anwar et al. \(2020\)](#) point out that Abduh opposed *taqlid* (blind adherence to tradition) and encouraged rationality in interpreting Islamic teachings. This reflected an attempt to adapt Islamic teachings to developments, often leading to controversies over which innovations are considered *bid'ah* and which are seen as necessary adaptations.

In religious discourse, *bid'ah* is often used by conservative groups to reject innovations they see as contradicting Islam’s original teachings. Beyond theology, the term also serves as a rhetorical tool in political discourse, used to discredit policies deemed incompatible with Islamic values. For example, in some Sharia-based legal

systems, reforms perceived as threatening religious authenticity are labeled as *bid'ah* to justify opposition (Feldman, 2012).

As globalization influences Muslim societies, debates over *bid'ah* have intensified. Conservative groups often label modern innovations—such as democracy, banking systems, or technology in worship—as *bid'ah*, while reformist scholars argue for contextual adaptation. The term has even extended beyond religious discourse, applied to cultural changes and social norms that deviate from tradition.

Social media amplifies these debates, with Islamic influencers using *bid'ah* to critique modern lifestyles, while progressive scholars counter that such rigidity ignores Islam's adaptability.

Wittgenstein's language game theory explains how *bid'ah* takes on different meanings depending on its usage. Kopytko (2007) highlights that in theological contexts, *bid'ah* strictly means deviation from prophetic teachings, whereas in socio-political discourse, it broadly applies to anything perceived as new or foreign.

Variations in interpretation reflect deeper ideological divides:

- a. Conservative societies reject most religious innovations as *bid'ah*.
- b. Progressive communities view *bid'ah* more flexibly, allowing for modern adaptations.

This contested nature of *bid'ah* underscores broader struggles over religious authority, modernization, and identity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the relationship between memorization and meaning in religious terms is dynamic and constantly evolving, reflecting not only social, political, and identity changes but also broader ideological and communicative shifts within communities that use them. Terms such as *hijrah*, *jihad*, *sharia*, and *kafir* experience significant semantic shifts, influenced by historical developments, media discourse, and contemporary socio-cultural context. Wittgenstein's language game theory provides a strong conceptual framework to understand this phenomenon, where the meaning of a term is not fixed but constructed through social interactions. For example, the word *hijrah*, which originally referred to the physical migration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers, now signifies a lifestyle or spiritual transformation towards a more Islamic way of life.

Additionally, this research highlights how religious terms are shaped not only by scriptural teachings but also by dominant social ideologies and practices. For instance, *Sharia* has shifted from a primarily legal term to a broader socio-economic and cultural symbol, encompassing areas such as Islamic finance, tourism, and fashion. These shifts demonstrate that religious language functions beyond theological discourse—it actively constructs social identities and group boundaries.

This study reinforces the relevance of Wittgenstein's language game theory in analyzing religious terminology and its role in identity formation and social integration. By examining how religious terms are negotiated in different contexts, the study provides insights into the interplay between language, power, and ideology in contemporary Muslim societies.

Findings from this study have practical implications for religious education, where understanding the evolving meanings of religious terms can promote more inclusive and contextually aware teachings. In media discourse, recognizing how religious language is framed can help counter misrepresentations and reduce polarization in public debates. Additionally, in interfaith dialogue, acknowledging the fluidity of religious terminology can foster more productive and nuanced discussions between communities.

Future studies could explore comparative analyses of religious terminology across different linguistic and cultural contexts. A cross-regional study could examine how Islamic terms evolve in Muslim-majority and minority communities, revealing differences in interpretation and adaptation. A linguistic comparison of terms like *Sharia* and *jihad* in Arabic, English, and Indonesian could highlight semantic shifts across languages. Additionally, analyzing digital media could show how social platforms reshape contemporary religious discourse. These studies would offer a broader understanding of how religious language adapts across societies and communication settings.

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