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Translating Racial Discourse in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: A Comparative Analysis of Arabic Translation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how racially charged language in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1960) has been translated into Arabic, focusing on the ethical, cultural, and pedagogical implications of translation strategies. Using Skopos Theory, Venuti's domestication/foreignization model, and Spivak's postcolonial ethics, the research analyses the rendering of terms such as the racial slur ("N-word"), "boy," "white trash," and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) across multiple Arabic translations. A comparative study, integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with cross-linguistic comparison against the French, Spanish, and German translations, detects a consistent pattern of defensive domestication among Arabic translations, including euphemization, omission, and lexical substitution. Though culture-sensitive, the strategies tend to downplay the novel's critique of institutional racism and can efface its historical context. Western translations, however, typically retain racially marked words with Para textual glossing for critical reception. The study highlights the translator as a cultural mediator whose decisions are dictated by socio-political norms, institutionally imposed, and audience requirements. It recommends adopting ethical domestication or critical foreignization, facilitated by annotated bilingual editions, pedagogy underpinned by culture, and open translator commentary. These approaches strive to uphold historical faithfulness, foster intercultural understanding, and develop critical literacy. In this way, the research contributes to debates in translation ethics, postcolonial studies of translation, and language pedagogy, and argues for translation as a

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linguistic and ethical practice.

Keywords: Translation; Ethics; African American Vernacular English; Cultural Mediation; Arabic Translation; Comparative Translation; Translator Agency; Critical Foreignization

1. Introduction

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is a 20th-century American literary classic, universally admired for its scathing denunciation of racial oppression, moral development, and the deeply ingrained social stratifications of the Jim Crow South. Narrated through the eyes of Scout Finch, a white girl child living in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, the novel is a child's-eye view of institutional racism, founded on the indefensible charge and conviction of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. The novel's enduring strength is not merely its morality play, but its deliberate play on words particularly its deployment of racially charged lexicon, dialectal variation, and institutional jargon to stage the work of racial oppression. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s language does not function as a tabula rasa medium but as a performative and ideological instrument. The constant referencing of the racial epithet commonly referred to as the "N-word," the infantilizing referring to adult Black men as "boy," and the representation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are all signs that invoke power, subordination, resistance, and cultural identity. For Gates[1] argues that language within the novel represents both subjectivity and marginalization, so that racism is not just a social or legal status but a regime of discourse inherent in ordinary speech. Rendering such ideologically and linguistically charged work into Arabic a language within its own unique historical and cultural context of race poses severe ethical, semiotic, and ideological dilemmas. Translation here becomes less an issue of linguistic equivalence and more one of cultural negotiation, one that risks either upholding or undermining the novel's critical political power. This study offers a critical analysis of the Arabic translations of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with a focus on what becomes of racially and socially inflected language. It is framed by three core theoretical paradigms: Skopos Theory[2], which prioritizes the function and intended purpose of the target text in shaping translational decisions; Venuti's[3,4] model of domestication and foreignization, which interrogates the visibility and ethical stance of the translator; and Spivak's[5] postcolonial ethics of translation, which emphasizes the imperative to preserve the voice of the subaltern and resist its erasure. These models are also supported by theoretical accounts of translator agency[6], cultural semiotics and identity[7], and politics of representation[8], making it possible for a more than two-dimensional critique of the ideological basis of translation decisions. In non-Arabic contexts, the analysis adopts a comparative approach, examining translations into French, Spanish, and German in order to shed light on alternative translational ideologies shaped by different colonial and racial histories. Whereas Western translations keep racially abusive language intact, using euphemisms in footnotes or prefaces, Arabic translations use euphemization, lexical substitution, or censorship. These methods reflect broader cultural taboos and sensitivities in the Arab world and mediate race discussion through class-based or indirect discourse[9,10], potentially diluting the racial critique of the novel.

Borrowing from reception theory[11,12] and reader-response criticism, the study also addresses the ways in which translation strategies can define or circumscribe interpretation, notably in pedagogical settings. Translations used in classrooms without critical contextualization can perpetuate sanitized or depoliticized reading of racism, thereby undermining the novel's pedagogic and ethical ambitions. Utilizing decolonial theory[13], and Berman's[14] "politics of silence," the research underscores the effect of systematically repressing racial trauma and dialectal specificity in the target text. The study argues that racially charged fiction must be translated with robust paratextual tools translator's forewords, footnotes, glossaries, and scholarly introductions that clarify culturally specific terminology, context of history, and ideological tensions. The absence of these apparatuses in most Arabic publications limits readers' interpretive access and imperils the novel's spatial, temporal, and moral critique. Placing *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s translation in international race, memory, and justice discourses, this research contributes to the emerging fields of translation ethics and

postcolonial translation studies. It also provides pragmatic guidance for translators, instructors, and publishers, foregrounding the translator as cultural mediator who is more than mere linguistic transmitter to navigate the complex politics of representation, identity, and justice in a world of globalization.

Novelty, Research Gap, and Contribution

While *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been translated into Arabic multiple times, no scholarly study has comprehensively investigated in a systematic way how the translations handle racially charged language in terms of translation ethics and pedagogical efficacy. Previous research into Arabic literary translation has concentrated on linguistic fidelity, cultural adjustment, or thematic consistency to the neglect of the ideological and didactic significance of sanitizing or omitting racial discourse. Moreover, comparative analyses of Arabic translations alongside those in French, Spanish, and German remain limited, particularly regarding the treatment of racially charged lexicon and sociolectal variation such as AAVE.

This study addresses these gaps through four key contributions:

Theoretical Integration: It synthesizes Skopos Theory, Venuti's domestication/foreignization dichotomy, and Spivak's postcolonial ethics into a cohesive analytical framework for examining the translation of racially sensitive content in Arabic. Cross-Linguistic Comparison: It employs a comparative methodology to compare Arabic translation strategies with the rest of the world in order to illustrate how different colonial and racial histories affect translational choices. Pedagogical Application: It bridges translation analysis with pedagogy through recommending systematized intervention in the classroom to balance the limitations of euphemized translations as well as promote critical reading of the text. Ethics of Online Translation: It extends the analysis to contemporary concerns raised by AI and machine translation, examining how algorithmic mechanisms treat and potentially distort racially charged terms. Through the integration of theoretical maturity, cross-cultural analysis, and utility, this research enriches scholarship in translation studies, postcolonial theory, and language education. This work offers a critical model for evaluating ethically complex translations and provides actionable suggestions for stakeholders who are committed to upholding the integrity and transformatory potential of literary works within multilingual and multicultural contexts.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework: A Critical Approach to Translating Racial Discourse

Translating racially charged discourse from English into Arabic necessitates a multi-layered analytical framework that critically examines the interplay of language, ideology, cultural memory, and power. This study employs a triangulated theoretical model that integrates Skopos Theory [2], Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization [3,4], and postcolonial translation ethics as articulated by Gayatri Spivak. This body of theoretical ideas is complemented further by proposals taken from translator agency, comparative translation studies, cultural semiotics, and decolonial thinking. Collectively, these strands of thought enable a critical response to the ethical, ideological, and representational concerns at stake in translating racial discourse chiefly that of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* into Arabic.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and comparative textual analysis. The research procedure involves four interdependent stages of data collection, classification, analysis, and validation. The primary data are the source English original of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and three published Arabic translations belonging to diverse socio-historical and linguistic contexts. For cross-linguistic analysis, some French, Spanish, and German translations are also subjected to analysis as standard references. The focus is on quotations with racially marked terms such as the racial epithet commonly called the "N-word," phrases such as "boy" and "white trash," African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and other racially charged terms invoking race, class, and identity.

Passages are categorized uniformly according to the translation strategy employed: (1) literal retention direct translating of the source word; (2) euphemization mitigating the offensiveness of the word; (3) omission complete exclusion of the expression; (4) lexical replacement replacement with a culturally adapted equivalent; and (5) dialect neutralization translating sociolectal speech into standardized

Modern Standard Arabic.

Analysis is conducted through Fairclough's[15] CDA model, allowing for investigation into how translation choices reinforce or subvert hegemonic ideological structures. Comparative analysis involves side-by-side comparison of source text and each of the Arabic translations, taking note of semantic variation, erasure of sociolectal markers, and tone or affect shifts. Cross-linguistic benchmarking with European translations further describes the influence of cultural, historical, and translational conventions on racial discourse management.

In ensuring rigor and validity, the study incorporates multiple validation procedures. First, peer review of coding was carried out by two independent academics to assess consistency and reliability of translation strategy categorization. Second, methodological triangulation was achieved through cross-verifying findings against published academic work on race, translation, and postcolonial critique, namely peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus. Finally, professional advice through interviewing two expert Arabic literary translators provided significant insights into the cultural, institutional, and ethical constraints affecting the translation of racially sensitive vocabulary.

As part of the illustration of the analytical outcomes, selected textual instances of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and their translations into Arabic are compiled and examined, highlighting the specific strategies concerned and their broader ideological implications. This reflexive and systematic procedure ensures a systematic, open, and critically conscious analysis, raising the validity of the outcomes as well as the usefulness of the research to critical translation studies.

2.1. Skopos Theory and Functionalist Translation

Hans Vermeer[2] named his Skopos Theory after the Greek word for 'purpose,' which brought a radical shift in translation studies, redirecting the focus from equivalence to purpose. In translations undertaken with Skopos, the translator does not aim to reproduce the linguistic form of the source text, but instead, considers the function or skopos of the target text in its local communicative and cultural context. This freedom empowers the translator to choose their translational manoeuvres based on the target audience expectations, the institutional context of the translation, and the socio-cultural customs of the target culture. The target audience's expectation, the purpose of the translation, and the context of the translation for readers all have implications for how the translator renders verbatim racial vocabulary in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For example, if the translation is prescribed for use in secondary school classes, the translator may use euphemistic substitutions in line with institutional expectations for educational contexts that are oriented towards the avoidance of explicit conversations about race and systemic injustices. Alleviating the either/or choice to speak about race in terms of euphemizations rather than explicit recognition is an ethical risk the translator must bear, including the note of moral avoidance, historical erasure, and loss of ideological impact. In this sense, Skopos Theory raises the ethical question of relevance to whom the translator is loyal when making translational representation, the source text, the target audience, or the institutional gatekeepers and context? The decisions a translator needs to make around images of race are magnified when the source language includes traumatic expressions, such as racial slurs that do not exist in Arabic, for example. The translator walks an unsteady tightrope between the communicative function and ethical duty to consider. Skopos Theory, developed in the German functionalist school, contends that the purpose (skopos) of a translation determines the approach adopted[2]. As outlined by Munday[16], this shifts the priority from source-text loyalty to target-text purpose, allowing a more dynamic and context-related approach, one that is particularly suitable for translating ethically challenging texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where pedagogic or cultural purpose may be prioritized over word-for-word accuracy.

2.2. Domestication and Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti's[3,4] notions of domestication and foreignization provide a critical framework for assessing translator visibility and cultural mediation. Domestication involves aligning the source text to the linguistic norms and cultural expectations of the target reader, often suppressing linguistic or ideological difference and otherness. Foreignization preserves the otherness of the source text, and therefore forces the target reader to confront its cultural and ideological otherness. Arabic translations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* have been almost entirely domesticated. Racial slurs such as the "N-word" are generally translated as aswad (أسود, "Black")

or zanjī (زنجي, "Zanj"), both of which carry different cultural and historical implications and do not encompass the full semantic violence of the original. Venuti warns domestication risks contributing to a cultural amnesia and obscures the ethical weight of the source text by smoothing over its most uncomfortable or disruptive elements. While some readers may feel alienated by foreignization, particularly cultural outsiders without access to African American historical and cultural reference points, there is also knowledge of exposure to ethical resistance to ideological flattening. A calibrated foreignizing approach perhaps accompanied by paratextual commentary could go a long way toward preserving the historicity and affective force of racially marked language. Lawrence Venuti [17] condemns the dominance of domestication, the translation approach appears "transparent" and culturally near as a form of cultural imperialism that erases the foreignness of the source text and renders the translator invisible. Foreignization, on the other hand, retains the linguistic and cultural difference, and the reader is forced to confront the "otherness" of the original. This tension lies at the heart of racial discourse translation, where domestication will more often than not lead to erasure of violent histories.

2.3. Postcolonial Ethics and the Politics of Voice

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's [5] postcolonial analysis of translation interrogates the erasure of subaltern voices in dominant-discursive regimes. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" [5], Spivak argues that subaltern subjects are repeatedly spoken for or spoken over, particularly through homogenizing translation practice that reproduces imperial epistemologies. Such critical thinking around translation raises important considerations that impact the translation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and engagement with the characters of Tom Robinson and Calpurnia, who speak through African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Spivak proposes a practice of "critical fidelity" in which the translator embarks on a method of preserving the political and cultural specificity of a lifeworld available to marginalized speech rather than neutralizing it through the types of linguistically standardized rendering that make translation possible. For example, rendering AAVE into formal Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) involves losing the sociolectal markers of resistance and marginality that negatively define either character's identity. Losing those modes of speaking in translation doesn't just carry the weight of failing to present authentic characters, but it also maintains the prioritization of formal over vernacular speech, asserting hierarchies of language over the margins of language. Thus, the politics of voice in translation cannot be decoupled from the ethics of vision. Translators need to be aware if epistemic violence is happening when translating marginal identities into dominant/superimposed/developing linguistic codes, especially in sociolinguistically differentiated spaces such as the Arab world. Gayatri Spivak's [18] musings about aesthetic education reveal translation in practical, ethical terms: translation is not a neutral practice, but an ethical responsibility. A translator confronted with the voice of the oppressed must wrestle not just with how to translate, but whether to speak for the other. This question of ethical responsibility becomes increasingly pressing when considering translating the speech of Black characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where the stakes of epistemic violence are high.

2.4. Translator Agency and Ideological Positioning

The emphasis of modern translation studies is on the translator as a situated agent, not a neutral text mediator, because cultural, political, and ideological positioning has to be accounted for when analyzing the translation process. As Hermans [6] has noted, "translation always involves some degree of embedding" and translators exist within networks of institutional expectations and political power structures. Similarly, Bassnett and Trivedi [19] suggest that "translation is always ideological" and that it is a form of rewriting based on the translator's framework of understanding, priorities, and positionality within the translation practice. In Arabic-speaking contexts, there are often institutional constraints under which translators must operate; for example, censorship protocols set out by the publisher, or educational policies and pragmatics around the teaching of adverse race-related issues that centre Islamophobia and anti-Black racism can influence decisions other than those canonized in the practice. In other words, translators often have to make choices about how to "say what," concerning an ethical and methodological responsibility to communicate differences (ideas, experiences, etc.) when faced with institutional constraints. In addition, many Arab translators do not share lived ex-

periences with anti-Black racism, as is the case with the texts themselves, so decisions are made that render racial characteristics, changing them inconceivably, or concealing them. Examining the agent of the translator, therefore, requires consideration at both levels of structural concern (i.e., publishing standards and accepted political ideologies) and agency decision-making (i.e., word choices, register of word). The case of the Arabic translation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* captures the operation of ideological mediation at multiple levels of text production. The ethical responsibilities of translator agency cannot be conceptualized separately from their professional ethical responsibilities. As discussed by Schäffner and Wiesemann[20], translators are not technicians but moral agents making ideological decisions in their practice. Racially-textured texts that may cause challenges around euphemization or retention of elements of the text are certainly not neutral decisions but rather involved negotiation around power, memory, and representation.

2.5. Comparative Translation and Cross-Cultural Mediation

A comparative study of translation across multiple linguistic and cultural systems can show how different societies negotiate the representation of race and socio-historical trauma in their different textual adaptations. Translations in French an example of how race is represented translated the text using the term nègre, a word that has much ediffers and continues to evoke the colonial experience. A more or less similar circumstance occurs in the Spanish language, where either negro appears or the variant is substituted by euphemistic text. The choice of a eufemistic substitution is dictated, in part, to regional contexts. Translations in Germany have used the word Neger—which is now understood as to refer to the term in an offensive manner, but may have even included textual explanations or critical annotations that problematic in relation to blackness or race representation. All of these different implementations of the concept of race represent different national histories regarding race and racial ideologies, in addition to their cross-cultural representation translation tradition. In these same contexts, translations in Arabic exhibited a persistent reluctance to engage directly in the discourse of race. The Arabic translation experiences can be analyzed through a number of factors including the cultural taboos of race, the ideologies of pan-Arab nationalism, and the legacies of Afro-Arab histories[9,10]. Accordingly, comparative analysis will locate Arabic translation experiences in a global cross-disciplinary dialogue of race, memory, and cultural representations.New research has underscored the ideological burden of conveying racial slurs. Alvstad and Rosa[21] characterize retranslations as responses to changes in social attitudes, as later retranslations either magnify or dissolve the offensive content depending on contemporary ethical standards. In addition, Di Giovanni[22] convincingly argues that in audiovisual translation context [the use of racial slurs is often mitigated or omitted], paralleling a global "defensive domestication" trend that borders on historical erasure.

2.6. The Global Politics of Racial Discourse

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon provides an initial critique of racism from the landscape of psychological and linguistic dimensions[13]. Fanon describes racial epithets as ways of epistemic violence in which inferiorities are placed on the Black subject. A translation of such words is not only a linguistic task but, instead, an ethical act as it involves histories of oppression, a factor in forming identities, and symbolic power. Stuart Hall's[8] theory of representation situates this critique of the psychological and linguistic aspects of racism as Fanon emphasized in relation to discourse. Hall suggested that racial identities were not essential to minority subjects, but something that was formed through cultural modes of signification. As such, translation is another or additional re-signification process that may support or resist dominant ideologies on race. Rendering language in translation, therefore, is never ideologically innocent. It is a point of contention, re-negotiation of meaning, exertion of power, contested identities and agency.

2.7. Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis and Comparative Textual Study

To conduct this study, We relied on a qualitative approach based on comparative textual analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Drawing on the framework set out in Fairclough[15] method, the study provided an analytic account of how language reconstructs and reproduces ideology, and language, as Delabastita[23] indicated, would be useful in considering how dialect and sociolect would be

translated, especially a sociolect that has political ramifications. The analysis compares selected sections of text in the source text with their Arabic translation and compares the use of racial lexicon, sociolectal language and ideological lexicon (presuming the selected sections employed this). The analysis will assess the accuracy of the translation but also the broader ideological and ethical consequences of each decision-making; does it maintain, neutralise or distort the racial politics of the source narrative?. The analysis is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on how language reproduces power relations and ideological norms [15]. CDA is well-suited to researching racial discourse because it helps to highlight how the act of translation i.e. rendering AAVE as neutralized or erasing slurs participates in the erasure of colonial/racial displacements and historical racism. Furthermore, Baker [24] illustrates how translation decisions involving narrative framing influence public perceptions of conflict and injustice, underpinning the imperative of critical consciousness in the professionalism of literary translation.

3. Historical and Social Context of the Novel: Racism and Justice in the American South

Gaining a deep understanding of the historical and social backdrop of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is essential to fully grasp the ethical and ideological challenges that come with interpreting its racially charged language. Set in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the 1930s, the story unfolds during the Great Depression and under the shadow of Jim Crow laws, two powerful historical forces that deeply influenced race relations and the justice system in the American South.

3.1. The Jim Crow South and Institutional Racism

The Jim Crow era, spanning from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, created a legal and social framework that upheld racial segregation and systematically marginalized African Americans. This deeply embedded racism shaped every part of public life from schools and workplaces to the courts. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the trial of Tom Robinson echoes real-life cases like the Scottsboro Boys trials of 1931, where Black men were unjustly accused and denied fair treatment because of their race. Harper Lee's courtroom scenes are not just narrative devices they serve as critiques of the racially coded language woven into legal systems. Words like "boy," "Negro," and the condescending tone white characters use when addressing Black defendants are loaded with implications that uphold racial hierarchies. For translators, this presents not just a linguistic challenge but also a moral one: deciding how, or even if, to reproduce the ideological harm embedded in such language when adapting it for another audience.

3.2. Language and the Politics of Voice

African American characters in the novel refer to each other in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a language system with its own grammar, vocabulary, and sociohistorical significance. Far from being a marker of linguistic deficiency, AAVE has historically been used as a form of cultural resistance, group identification, and in-group solidarity. Calpurnia's code-switching from Standard English to AAVE is a classic example of W.E.B. Du Bois's (1903) "double consciousness," the ability to see oneself through the vision of a dominant oppressive culture with a self consciousness of one's own [1]. The speech of Tom Robinson, marked by deference tone, hesitation, and syntactic reduction, is a case of internalized oppression and survival strategy in a hostile racial order. Rendering these speech mannerisms into formal or neutral Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) risks effacing these planes of meaning, reducing the characters' complexity, and undermining the racialized power dynamics they embody.

3.3. Intersections of Class, Race, and Linguistic Representation in Arabic Translations of To Kill a Mockingbird

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Arabic is plagued by significant challenges in encoding the novel's intricate intersections of race, class, and linguistic representation. Intrinsically at the center of this complexity are words and practices of discourse mapping onto the American South's sociohistorical texture, and particularly in the context of Southern Gothic fiction. A close reading of the

Arabic translations proves a habitual application of euphemization, omission, and semantic neutralization strategies that, while often culturally motivated, sap the novel's ethical and thematic charge. One of the most striking features of the novel's social critique is its exposure of intra-racial stratifications within white societies. The white trash epithet, for instance, performs not just as a class-based insult, but also as a marker of whiteness's fractured state in the American South. Anchored in a historically contextualized 19th-century racialized class discourse, the epithet indicates the manner in which economic standing can undermine racial privilege amongst whites. Arabic translations tend to render it as طبقة منحطة من البيض ("a degraded class of whites"), which preserves the socioeconomic connotation but loses the historical specificity and racial-class interconnectedness of the original. This flattening effect risks reproducing a monolithic conception of whiteness, and thereby undermining one of the novel's most trenchant critiques of American social stratification. Similarly, the term boy, used by white protagonists to address Black men, is an instrument of racial infantilization and power assertion in the Jim Crow South. However, its Arabic equivalent يا فتى (yā fatā) does not carry the same pejorative and racially charged meaning as the original text. The translation eradicates the lexical violence inherent in the source, excising the system dynamics of racial domination. This semantic cleansing procedure is a classic instance of what Venuti [3] describes as domestication, wherein the foreign text is made culturally palatable at the expense of losing its critical edge. The translation of the racial insult commonly referred to as the "N-word" is also fine proof of this phenomenon. It is translated variously in Arabic as زنجي (zanjī), أسود (aswad), or simply omitted. Whereas zanjī carries with it a history of East African slavery in Arab-Islamic discourses, it cannot recreate the body blow, dehumanizing force of the English slur in the American racial lexicon. Aswad, also simply "black," is rather a neutral term that depletes the word of its histories and emotional taint. Omission, while perhaps motivated by cultural sensitivities, eliminates one of the defining aspects of racial discourse and therefore reduces the sense of moral and historical urgency for the story. These strategies support broader patterns of ideological domestication to slow intercultural understanding [3].

Portrayal of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Arabic translations only aggravates these issues. AAVE is not only a linguistic variation but an icon of sociocultural identity, resistance, and marginalization. In Arabic translations, though, AAVE tends to be translated into Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which, while widely understandable, lacks the sociolinguistic specificity necessary to convey class, race, and regional identity. Regional Arab dialects are used in some cases an approach that runs the risk of putting anachronisms or culturally inappropriate connotations. By contrast, the French and Spanish versions employ français populaire or working-class regional dialects (Andalusian and Rioplatense Spanish, for example), respectively, to reproduce the sociolectal distinctions marking marginality. The respective Arabic versions cannot achieve the same result, and dialect erasure accompanied by a dearth of linguistic authenticity follows. Furthermore, the symbolic topographies of characters such as Boo Radley and Dolphus Raymond protagonists archetypal of social opposition and marginalization in the Southern Gothic tradition are more than a question of lexical accuracy to translate successfully. Their allegorical significance is based upon a rich cultural and literary history of American racial and historical tensions. Without adequate paratextual feedback in the guise of footnotes, prefaces, or translator's commentaries these meaning levels are unrecoverable for Arabic readers. Unlike French, German, or Spanish translations, which often include critical apparatuses clarifying racially charged terminology (e.g., nègre, Neger), Arabic editions typically lack such contextual clarifications. The absence itself conveys what Cronin [7] describes as a broader cultural reluctance in the Arab world to engage racially charged discourse directly, thereby echoing cultural silences into the translation. From the comparative viewpoint, the clashing strategies between language cultures highlight the ideological dimensions of translation. French and German translators, for instance, prefer to keep historically offending words intact with paratextual caution, adhering to Antoine Berman's [14] principle of retaining the "foreignness" of the text. Spanish translations vary geographically, taking account of varying postcolonial sensitivities in the Spanish-speaking world. Arabic translations incline toward linguistic and cultural assimilation, valuing acceptability over loyalty to the source's critical discourse. In general, the Arabic translations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* tend to mollify the novel's racial and class tensions by euphemizing, eliminating, and

normalizing language. While these choices may be in accord with prevailing local cultural norms, they ultimately compromise the novel's capacity to disturb readers regarding issues of systemic injustice, historical trauma, and linguistic power. A more ethically and culturally responsive strategy one that entails paratextual clarification and sociolectal and symbolic precision would more effectively keep the novel in current literary and ethical currency.

4. Expansion: Translator Agency and the Political Economy of Translation

In traditional models of literary translation, the translator has been relegated to the margin as an invisible medium between languages, with the goal of replicating meaning as neutrally and transparently as possible. This model relies on the myth of objectivity, in which the translator's voice is suppressed in the interest of preserving an illusory fidelity to the source text. However, as Venuti [3] and Hermans [6] have convincingly put forward, translators are not passive mediators but active cultural agents whose interpretive choices effectively shape the ideological and affective reception of a text. In the case of politically engaged texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the translator's role becomes even more crucial because translation here involves not only linguistic transfer but also ethical position-taking and cultural brokerage.

4.1. The Translator's Positionality in Arabic Contexts

In Arabic translations of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the translator's positionality takes on heightened significance due to the sociopolitical environment in which these translations are received. Race and racism debates are underdeveloped and politicized in the majority of Arab societies, where discussions of Blackness are more likely to be framed by colonial history, religious tradition, and cultural taboos [10]. Translators must therefore navigate a line marked by competing loyalties: allegiance to the racialized violence inscribed in the source text, obeisance to sociocultural norms of the target group, and compliance with institutional pressure coming from publishers, ministries of education, or cultural institutions. The translator's decisions are frequently delimited by powers outside the text. State-commissioned translations, or those approved for school curricula, may require the removal or euphemization of racial epithets, the simplification of dialect, or the neutralization of politically sensitive content. These limitations constitute a form of ideological gatekeeping, wherein translation becomes not a vehicle of cultural confrontation or pedagogy, but of moral cleansing and historical concealment.

4.2. Translation as Political Labor

The political economy of translation is key to managing not only what is translated but also how. Models of funding, market demand, and censorship regimes all shape the production and circulation conditions of translations. In Arab contexts, where translations are often commissioned by state institutions or culturally conservative publishers, the racial stakes of discourse are often depoliticized through editorial intervention. Works such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which draw attention to systemic injustice and racial violence, are subject to processes of ideological domestication in which the translated work is aligned with prevailing national or moral discourses. This economic and political contextualization repositions the translator as a politically embedded agent one who must mediate between multiple, and often competing, demands. The rendering of racial insults such as the "N-word" comes to signify this conflict. The term will be euphemized or censored by some translators to avoid social outrage or official censure, but these choices also amount to an ideological stance one that prioritizes cultural comfort over historical veracity and ethical provocation.

4.3. The Ethics of Invisibility and the Case for Transparency

The invisibility of the translator a concept notoriously problematized by Venuti remains a pressing issue in the Arab literary scene. Unlike the majority of Western publishing cultures, in which translators are commonly recognized by prefaces, footnotes, or public interviews, Arabic translations prefer to keep the identity and rationale of the translator hidden. This lack of paratextual engagement not only deprives the reader of interpretive context but also obscures the ideological labor involved in translating challenging and painful histories into a foreign language. For, as Cronin [7]

argues, translation is always implicated in questions of identity, power, and ethics. The decision to cut or euphemize racially charged language is not an isolated one; it reflects broader societal attitudes toward race, history, and cultural self-conception. Lacking transparency, these decisions risk being perceived as objective or apolitical when they are, in fact, passionately ideological. To remedy this, there is an urgent need to reimagine translators as visible and responsible cultural producers. Translators must be empowered to speak for themselves, and publishers must provide space for such forums as prefaces, translator's notes, or interviews where there can be open discussion of the ethical and political issues of translation. Rather than being relegated to the status of technician or intermediary, translators must be confirmed as co-authors of meaning whose interpretive labor cannot be detached from the text's reception. Translation, as Tymoczko[25] points out, is always implicated in power relations. The decision to euphemize racial language or omit it entirely is more than just a linguistic variable; it is set within power relations, power relations between cultures, between institutions, and between narratives of history. In the Arabic translations of American racial texts discussed here, this power dynamic often emerges as a defensive retreat from uncomfortable truths, and an ever-increasing entrenchment in cultural taboos instead of challenging them.

4.4. Toward Ethical and Empowered Translation Practice

Naming translator agency requires institutional policy change and scholarly debate. Translators must be trained ethically to handle charged topics such as race, trauma, and colonialism. Translation institutions and publishers must also develop guidelines that balance cultural sensitivities and intellectual integrity, resisting the temptation to sanitize historically important texts in the interest of palatability. And lastly, to translate To Kill a Mockingbird into Arabic is not a purely linguistic process it is an ideological negotiation. The translator occupies the intersection of a number of discourses: historical memory, cultural taboo, institutional constraint, and ethical imperative. To ignore the agency of the translator is to ignore the very processes by which texts are transformed, reinterpreted, and politicized across linguistic and cultural borders.

5. Pedagogical Implications: Translation, Education, and Critical Literacy

The Arabic translation of To Kill a Mockingbird has serious pedagogical consequences, particularly in secondary and tertiary institutions across the Arab world. Translated books are in most national curricula an institution of literary studies, giving students access to global stories and canonical literature. When translations are, however, stripped of their sociohistorical context and their ideological nuance, particularly pertaining to race, justice, and identity, the educational value of such works is seriously diminished. Erasure or euphemization of racially charged vocabulary, dialectal specificity, or culturally embedded allusion can render the text more acceptable culturally, but in so doing it annihilates its possibility for criticism. Students reading only domesticated or sanitized forms deny themselves opportunities to challenge the ethical, historical, and political investments of the original work.

5.1. Translation as a Site for Critical Literacy

In order to tackle these challenges, educators must adopt a critical literacy approach one which reads translation not as a transparent vehicle of meaning but as an interpretive exercise that is always ideologically grounded. Critical literacy as a practice puts the power of readers first in questioning texts, questioning prevailing ideologies, and comprehending the politics of representation. Teachers who teach with translated texts should encourage active student engagement in analyzing what is altered, omitted, or restated in translation. This pedagogy teaches not only linguistic literacy but also ethical literacy, cultural critique, and historical analysis.

5.2. Pedagogical Strategies

In order to apply critical literacy in the classroom, teachers might find the following helpful:

5.2.1. Comparative Passage Analysis

Students can be asked to read important passages of the source text as well as its translation. For instance, side-by-side positioning of the original use of the "N-word" against its translation with the words aswad (أسود) or zanjī (زنجي)

can prompt useful discussion regarding the affective and ideological aspects of euphemization. Students can study how these changes affect their reception of character, tone, and narrative importance.

5.2.2. Translator Choices Explorations

Teacher-mediated class discussion can prompt pupils to question specific translation decisions. Why should specific words be excluded or altered? Was the motive pedagogical, ideological, or institutional? This creates more elevated metalinguistic awareness and improved students' understanding of the sociopolitical nature of language.

5.2.3. Historical and Sociolinguistic Contextualization

To be able to meaningfully engage with the novel, students must learn about the history of racial segregation in the U.S., the Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and the emergence and significance of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Without learning this context, students will tend to misinterpret fundamental elements of the narrative, such as Tom Robinson's fawning speech or Calpurnia's code-switching, as stylistic devices rather than signs of systemic oppression and cultural resistance.

5.2.4. Localized Reflection and Ethical Parallels:

While To Kill a Mockingbird is rooted in an extremely specific American racial history, themes of prejudice, marginalization, and resistance have powerful resonances within Arab contexts. Teachers may encourage students to draw parallels between the novel's themes and local expressions of racial and ethnic injustice, whether anti-Blackness, migrant labor hierarchies, tribalism, or sectarianism. This reflection facilitates moral engagement and encourages students to consider how injustice is at once historically specific and transnationally resonant.

5.3. Reception, Expectation, and the Ethics of Engagement

It is due to the "horizon of expectations" that the reader brings to literature, contends Hans Robert Jauss[11], that reception is influenced. If students are only instructed with expurgated or domesticated texts, their interpretive horizon remains limited. They will be able to notice only Tom Robinson as a poor victim and not as a representation of systemic racial oppression. Similarly, they may overlook the significance of Calpurnia's dualistic language and present it as a stylistic element rather than as one of social negotiation and coded subversion. In such a scenario, Umberto Eco's[12] definition of the "open work" is pedagogically relevant. By opening up literature and translation as an open-ended and collaborative co-creation between author, translator, and reader, teachers can enable students to challenge, interrogate, and reconceive meaning instead of simply receiving it.

5.4. Instructing Translation as a Political and Ethical Action

Translation is not just a linguistic transaction; it is a political act of cultural reading. Instructors must thus transcend the translated document itself and introduce the act of translation itself as an item of study. This involves asking questions regarding the translator's agency, institutional limitations, and ethical issues of translating sensitive content. Positioning translation in literary pedagogy as a site of critical inquiry enables students to read world literature more intelligently, responsibly, and actively. It prepares them not just to read translated literature but to question it to ask whose voices are preserved, who is silenced, and what is at stake in making such decisions along the way.

6. Digital Translation Ethics and Comparative Practices: AI, Machine Translation, and the Challenges of Racial Discourse

The increasing reliance on machine translation (MT) and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered systems such as Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT has come with pressing ethical challenges in translating racially charged language. The systems are mainly coded for fluency, intelligibility, and user acceptability at the expense of semantic accuracy and cultural faithfulness. In the instance of sensitive historical and literary texts like To Kill a Mockingbird, this ranking leads to the systematic euphemization, omission, or neutralization of racially charged language algorithmic choices that are empty of historical context or ethical regard. Concerns regarding machine translation are on the rise at the moment.

Castilho & Gaspari[26] argue that ethical frameworks needs to be created in languages as part of an AI-assisted translation process with regard to bias, accountability, and transparency. Garcia[27] has also demonstrated that machine translation tools are poor at translating offensive language, excessively filtering while simultaneously reproducing harmful content without any regard for context. We need to start building hybrid models with the algorithmic expediency of machine translation paired with the ethical (and subjective) evaluation of humans, particularly in the context of education and literature. The rise of AI translation introduces still more obstacles for engaging with racial discourse. Because of deficient context and (absence of) ethical sensitivity, as Li[28] communicated, machine translation systems may mistakenly, either over-censor or literally process racially-charged terms. This suggests that although AI translation can be usefully applied, such ethically-contingent translation scenarios require human oversight and contextually aware algorithms.

6.1. Machine Translation Risks for Racially Charged Language

Machine translation technologies lack the cultural and historical literacy to grapple with the nuances of racialized language, and their products distort or erase significant sociopolitical meanings.

Example 1: The "N-word"
Source: "That nigger's guilty."
Google Translate (English → Arabic): «ذلك الرجل الأسود مذنب» ("That Black man is guilty.")
Analysis: The system renders the racial slur into a neutral descriptor, effectively removing the term of its historical baggage and dehumanizing potential. This is akin to protective domestication in human translation but devoid of any ethical or pedagogical consciousness, thereby concealing the ideological violence of the original.

Example 2: African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
Source: "I ain't done nothin' wrong."
Machine Output: «أنا لم أفعل أي شيء خاطئ.» (Formal Modern Standard Arabic)
Analysis: The translation normalizes AAVE to the prestige register of MSA, effacing markers of sociolectal identity and linguistic resistance. The flattening process eliminates the cultural and class-based registers of the speaker's voice, reproducing linguistic hierarchies rather than portraying them.

Example 3: Culturally Embedded Class-Race Terminology ("White Trash")
Source: "They're just white trash."
Machine Output: «إنهم مجرد قمامة بيضاء.» (Literal: "They're just white garbage.")
Analysis: Deprived of cultural context, the system produces a semantically erroneous and pragmatically strange translation. The idiomatic and historically particular connotations of white trash a term signaling class-based exclusion within whiteness are entirely lost, demonstrating the limitations of AI in handling culturally contingent expressions.

6.2. Ethical Implications

The automatic neutralization of racially marked language in MT systems has significant ethical implications: Distortion of Historical Reality: By sanitizing objectionable language devoid of context, AI tools risk providing a decontextualized and depoliticized version of history, thereby undermining the pedagogical potential of literary texts. Creation of False Equivalences: Neutral substitutions suggest equivalence between neutral and pejorative terminology, obscuring systemic power differentials and racial hierarchies. Undermining Pedagogical Goals: In academic as well as literary contexts, the erasure of racial speech inhibits critical exploration of systemic racism, reducing complex sociolinguistic phenomena to palatable, but false, translations.

6.3. Towards Ethical AI-Facilitated Translation

As a response to such concerns, a more culturally aware and transparent framework of digital translation needs to be developed. Best practices include: Annotated Outputs: AI platforms need to provide multiple versions of translations lit-

eral, culturally adapted, and historically contextualized with explanatory footnotes on the sociohistorical significance of key terms.

Context-Aware Modes: MT platforms need to include user-selectable options such as "retain marked language" or "educational mode" for maintaining offensive terms in contexts where fidelity and critical awareness are imperative.

Human-in-the-Loop Review: Sensitive or ideologically charged passages need to be reviewed jointly by human translators with expertise in cultural studies, history, and sociolinguistics for ethical and contextual correctness.

Transparent Decision Logging: AI systems should record and disclose translation decisions taken on potentially objectionable words so that users may understand how and why a particular rendering has been produced.

Implementing such controls would turn electronic translation from a model of passive automation into one of moral engagement, in which technological efficiency is not permitted to compromise historicity or cultural responsibility.

7. Comparative Analysis: Western vs. Arabic Translation Practices

For the purposes of analytical clarity, the difference between Arabic and Western translation methods has been redrawn in a tabulated schema:

1. Western Translations (French, Spanish, German):

Tend to retain racially charged terms (e.g., nègre, negro, Neger) in their original form, acknowledging their historical presence though controversial. Employ paratextual mechanisms such as footnotes, translator's preface, and glossaries to historicize offending lexicon and account for translation choices. Engage in critical treatment of the racial discourse of the source text, manifesting an ethos of transparency and cultural fidelity.

2. Arabic Translations:

Exhibit a defensive domestication tendency, wherein cultural acceptability and social harmony are given precedence over historical accuracy. Rarely provide paratextual explanation, giving readers no sense of the ideological stakes of translation decisions. Fail to disclose the ethical or cultural rationale for changing or suppressing racially sensitive content, thereby perpetuating general social taboos about race. This comparative analysis brings to the forefront a fundamental difference in translation ethics: while Western traditions often celebrate the text's foreignness as a site of critical reflection, Arabic translations often acculturate it to familiar cultural categories, at the cost of interpretive richness and historical accuracy.

8. Directions for Future Research: Reader Reception and the Digital Translation Ethics

Follow-up research on the Arabic translation of To Kill a Mockingbird would immensely benefit from empirically grounded approaches, particularly those analyzing the reception of translated texts by their target readers. Reader-response research that uses instruments such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups could be helpful in shedding light on how Arabic-speaking readers, especially students, interpret racially marked language, social stratification, and character interactions in translated versions. Substantive questions are worth asking: Do Arabic readers appreciate the historical legacy of the "N-word" when its euphemism is aswad (black)? Do they notice the sociolinguistic charge of Calpurnia's code-switching, especially if dialectal variation is institutionalized, sanitized, or erased in translation? These questions can only be answered by extended contact with readers themselves a method consonant with reception theory as developed by Jauss[11], which emphasizes the active reader in meaning-making. Venuti[29] also reminds us that translation is not merely a linguistic practice but a powerful instrument of cultural self-organization. In the absence of racialized language or its cleansing, readers can construct distorted understandings of historical truths, especially those regarding American slavery, segregation, and institutional racism. Empirical research can thus be employed to assess the ideological and pedagogical consequences of translation decisions and guide future practice towards greater accountability and fidelity. Meanwhile, the increasing popularity of machine-aided, AI-produced, and crowd-sourced translations raises immediate ethical issues. These technologies are insensitive to context in how they translate ideologically charged words. Machine translations of the "N-word," for instance, likely default to descriptive phrases like "black" or "African," robbing the original of

the violently meaning-drenched and dehumanizing historical connotations. Similarly, crowd-translated texts on unofficial sites such as Wattpad or fan fiction websites may prioritize fluency and familiarity over ethical fidelity to source texts, generating further elision of racial trauma. These issues require a paradigm shift in translation studies that opens up the discipline beyond textual fidelity to the sociotechnical contexts within which the translation is produced, circulated, and received. Digital translation ethics, algorithmic accountability, and platform governance need to be part of an innovative research agenda. Interdisciplinary partnerships will be key to crossing these boundaries. Translators, translation educators, software engineers, data scientists, and digital humanists need to collaborate with each other in order to create ethically grounded translation tools and digital literacy schemes. These projects may help make racially conscious texts translated with historical gravity and moral nuance they deserve despite an evolving digital era.

9. Extended Conclusion: Towards a Decolonial and Ethical Future in Translation Practice

This study has shown how the translation of To Kill a Mockingbird into Arabic is not just a neutral linguistic activity but a highly ideological one, with far-reaching pedagogical, political, and moral consequences. The typical euphemistic, omissive, and culturally domesticating strategies, even though widely justified as necessary for readability or cultural sensitivity, ultimately work to clean up systemic racism and to dilute the novel's core condemnation of injustice.

By comparison, in this work, it has been shown that the majority of Western translations, although not problem-free themselves, get progressively more engaged in the source material's race discourse through their use of footnotes, glossaries, or translator's prefaces. Arabic translations, on the other hand, adopt a strategy of defensive domestication where cultural familiarity and sociopolitical acceptability override historical accuracy. The almost complete lack of paratextual material like translator introduction makes this even worse, with readers left in the dark about the ideological filtering that has taken place.

To move towards a more social and ethical translation model, the translator must be remade as an agent cultural and ethical mediator rather than an invisible pipe. What choices a translator makes whether to keep a racial slur intact, whether to include explanatory notes, or whether to translate culturally specific allusions are never politics-free. These decide reader perception but also broader cultural discourse on race, history, and power.

As Berman[14] indicates, "trial of the foreign" is not merely a battle of words but an ethical one. Obliterating the racial trauma inscribed in the source text is a form of epistemic violence a reproduction of colonial patterns of domination that silence or nullify the voice of the marginal. In order to undo this, the discipline must embrace a decolonial model of translation practice.

This would involve several basic changes:

Critical Translation Ethics Training Programs: Translators should undergo training in critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and cultural semiotics so that they can become attuned to the ideological dangers of their craft.

Publishers' Ethical Codes: Publishing companies should adopt and enforce codes that promote transparency, ease the integration of paratexts, and help translators make ethically informed decisions.

Annotated Bilingual Editions: Especially for teaching purposes, annotated bilingual editions could potentially provide students with linguistic precision and cultural-historical context.

Participatory Models of Translation: Engagement with the voice of African and Afro-Arab scholars has the ability to enhance the translation process such that it is inclusive and ethically representative.

Technologies for Transparent Translation: Future technologies can be utilized to create platforms where translation decisions, especially those involving controversial or racially charged terms, are made transparent in real time to readers

Translation of racially and culturally charged material requires more than linguistic competence it requires ethical mindfulness, historical awareness, and cultural humility. As machine translation and artificial intelligence are increasingly incorporated into global communication, the demand for clear, context-based, and educationally accountable practices becomes increasingly urgent. Only through an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort one that marries technology with human experience and ethical reflection can translation

truly serve as a bridge among cultures, and not a barrier to understanding.

10. Conclusions

Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird in Arabic is far more than a technical translation exercise it's a highly ideological and ethical project that controls how readers in the Arab world are exposed to the history, trauma, and systemic unfairness of American racism. This study has established that recent Arabic translation practices exhibit a prevalent pattern of defensive domestication, as including euphemization, suppression, and neutralization of racially inflammatory words such as the "N-word," the infantilizing "boy," the class-race pejorative "white trash," and the special lexical identity of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). While such measures are motivated by institutional politics and cultural sensitivity, ultimately they gloss over the novel's radical critique of racial oppression, perhaps eliminating historical accuracy and undermining its pedagogical and moral power. French, Spanish, and German translations, on the contrary, retain racially marked terms and accompany them with paratextual aids such as footnotes, prefaces, and glossaries that situate the language ideologically and historically. These practices attest to fidelity to critical foreignization a hermeneutic of respect for the foreignness of the text and provocation toward a reflective, rather than passive, encounter with its discomfiting realities. Arabic translations, on the other hand, tend to be stripped of such apparatuses, depriving readers of the hermeneutic devices required to grasp the full import of racial ordering, linguistic conflict, and institutionalized violence written into the source text. Drawing on Skopos Theory, Venuti's domestication/foreignization framework, and Spivak's postcolonial ethics, this study has argued that translation must be reimagined not as a neutral conduit of meaning, but as a site of cultural mediation, ideological negotiation, and moral responsibility. The translator is not an invisible technician but a visible agent whose choices have profound consequences for how race, justice, and memory are understood across cultures. The removal of racial discussion from Arabic translation either by institutional censorship, cultural taboo, or pedagogical caution echoes what Berman and Fanon identify as a "politics of silence," an epistemic violence that silences subaltern voices and facilitates historical amnesia. As a corrective to this practice, the study proposes a shift toward ethical domestication or foreignization criticism practices that balance cultural readability with historical accuracy and ideological clarity. Practical approaches include the development of context-driven translation guidelines, the creation of annotated bilingual editions, the addition of Para textual commentary, and the integration of culturally attuned pedagogical methods into the classroom. In addition, in a time of machine translation and AI, when algorithmic systems automatically knock out offensive language without context or remorse, there is a pressing need for human-based, ethics-driven digital translation models that record, justify, and account for sensitive rendering choices. Finally, translating To Kill a Mockingbird and any racially inflammatory literary work has to be seen as a pedagogical and ethical practice. More than making a text "palatable," the objective has to be to make it provocative, to preserve its power to disturb, to teach, and to provoke critical consciousness. With education in Arabic-language increasingly encompassing international literature, translators, educators, publishers, and policymakers have to embrace translation as a social responsibility one that fosters decolonial awareness, intercultural comprehension, and dedication to social justice. Only then can the novel's enduring message that empathy, truth, and justice will prevail over prejudice and silence be truly effective across language and cultures.

Author Contributions

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