
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translation Strategies for Dialect and Colloquialism in Postcolonial Arabic Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how dialect and colloquial expression are rendered in postcolonial Arabic fiction through a close comparative study of Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses* and Nancy Roberts's English translation. It analyzes selected instances of rural speech, blessings, insults, exclamations, kinship terms, and other culturally embedded colloquial formulas that constitute the novel's Palestinian social and cultural voice. Using a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach, the study draws on Baker's translation strategies, Venuti's domestication and foreignization framework, and scholarship on Arabic diglossia, literary register, and translation loss to assess how meaning, and what is lost with it, moves across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The analysis finds that Roberts's translation generally preserves the propositional content of the source text but frequently normalizes dialectal features, softens colloquial intensity, or substitutes locally marked expressions with more accessible standard English, even as select passages achieve genuinely idiomatic solutions that retain pragmatic force, narrative rhythm, and reader accessibility simultaneously. These findings support the paper's central argument: translating dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic fiction is not a lexical or syntactic problem alone but a culturally consequential process bearing directly on voice, identity, and literary representation. The study concludes that effective rendering of colloquial speech depends on a deliberate balance between readability and the preservation of local texture, social nuance, and the cultural distinctiveness of the source world, a balance current translation practice achieves only unevenly.

KEYWORDS

Dialect translation; colloquialism; postcolonial Arabic literature; *The Time of White Horses*; translation strategies

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1. Introduction

Dialect and colloquialism occupy a central place in Arabic literary expression, especially in texts shaped by postcolonial histories, local memory, and social voice. In Arabic fiction, non-standard forms are rarely decorative; they are key means of differentiating characters, enacting communal relations, and representing the cultural texture of everyday life. Rural speech, proverbial turns of phrase, blessings, insults, and evaluative formulas situate the narrative in a specific social world and make that world audible. This is particularly true in Palestinian literature, where language routinely bears the weight of history, displacement, resistance, and collective belonging. Dialect encodes not only how people speak, but who they are, where they come from, and how they inhabit their land under colonial and postcolonial pressure.

Translating such material into English is therefore not a purely lexical task. It requires negotiating meaning, voice, and cultural specificity while deciding how much of the source text's social and regional identity can, or should, survive. Choices about dialect and colloquialism determine whether target readers encounter Palestinian villagers as generic figures in "plain" English or as agents of a localized culture whose speech resists full assimilation. Dialect translation thus becomes a revealing site for studying the politics of literary translation. It exposes, in visible form, the tension Toury (1995) identifies between "adequacy" (orientation toward the source) and "acceptability" (orientation toward target-culture norms), and forces translators to decide where on that continuum a given novel will be placed.

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Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses* offers a rich case for examining these issues. The novel is deeply rooted in Palestinian village life and draws on speech shaped by rural custom, kinship, hospitality ritual, blessing and curse, and colloquial evaluation. Its linguistic world moves between Standard Arabic and locally marked varieties, producing a texture in which everyday utterances carry social meaning alongside narrative function: greeting, insult, praise, lament, and respect are integral to character and moral atmosphere. Dialect is part of the book's narrative architecture, not a surface flourish. Nancy Roberts's English translation must render not only what is said but how it is said, keeping the text readable without erasing its local voice. The translation repeatedly decides whether village speech will be smoothed into generalized informality, kept visibly "foreign," or recreated through inventive English approximations of its social and emotional force, making the novel a valuable site for assessing what is gained or lost in practice.

The translation of Arabic dialect into English is complicated by diglossia. Formal written Arabic coexists with diverse spoken varieties that differ in vocabulary, rhythm, social value, and pragmatic force, and English lacks a parallel formal-colloquial continuum onto which these registers can be mapped. Ferguson's high/low distinction and Badawi's five-level model show Arabic usage distributed along a structured scale from Classical forms through educated spoken Arabic to illiterate dialect. Fiction exploits this scale: authors shift between levels to signal intimacy, class, authority, and political immediacy. In translation, this layered hierarchy collapses into a narrower range of options—mainly degrees of informality—so much encoded social meaning risks disappearing. A single dialectal expression can carry semantic content, class positioning, regional memory, and pragmatic force; straightforward lexical substitution rarely captures all four at once.

This study uses a combined theoretical lens to assess such loss across multiple levels. Baker's strategies and multi-level equivalence framework identify where meaning shifts occur—at the word, collocation, grammatical, textual, or pragmatic level—and provide a structured way to categorize Roberts's solutions to rural speech, blessings, insults, exclamations, kinship terms, and formulaic colloquial expressions. Venuti's domestication/foreignization distinction clarifies the translation's cultural direction: whether Roberts tends toward assimilation, making Palestinian villagers sound like generic Anglophone characters, or toward preserving difference in ways that are less fluent but more marked. Toury's adequacy/acceptability distinction highlights systemic pressures from the English literary system, which rewards readability and discourages unfamiliar non-standard forms. Together, these approaches allow the study to track not only what changes in translation, but what those changes mean for voice, register, and cultural representation in postcolonial Arabic fiction.

Recent work on Arabic-English translation shows that repetition, emphasis, and colloquial expression frequently lose force in transfer. Studies of Arabic verbal emphasis demonstrate that repeated forms, emphatic particles, and structurally reinforced expressions perform semantic and pragmatic work rather than mere ornament, and that this work is weakened when such features are omitted or simplified (ALYousef & Mahadi, 2019a, 2019b). Although these studies focus on emphasis rather than dialect, they underscore a point directly relevant here: Arabic expressive structures encode force, intimacy, warning, or persuasion in ways that literal transfer cannot easily reproduce caution equally applicable to colloquial and dialectal speech. When rural characters repeat a phrase or intensify a blessing, the form itself is part of the meaning; compressing such structures into a single English clause risk erasing this dimension.

Within postcolonial Arabic fiction, dialect and colloquialism also carry ideological weight. They index class, locality, gender, and communal belonging while resisting the homogenizing pull of standard language. Berman's account of the "destruction of vernacular networks of signification" as a deforming tendency in translation emphasizes that vernacular language is not mere local color but a way of being in language that binds a community to its world. In a novel like *The Time of White Horses*, where speech forms are bound to Palestinian village culture and the ethics of hospitality, honor, kinship, and collective memory, translation choices become narratively consequential rather than purely stylistic. Rendered too literally, colloquial expressions may sound awkward or opaque; overly normalized, they may lose social immediacy and emotional density. Roberts's translation therefore offers a concrete opportunity to see how a literary translator negotiates this tension, and how the resulting English text balances accessibility against cultural fidelity.

Despite growing research on Arabic-English literary translation, a clear gap remains in the study of dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic novels. Existing work has examined translation through equivalence, register, cultural transfer, and ideology, and surveys have noted how dialect is often shifted into informal English or neutralized into standard forms. Yet little research has systematically traced how dialectal speech and colloquial formulas function within a single postcolonial Arabic novel and how they are reshaped in English. Research specifically on how translation strategy affects the preservation of social voice, interpersonal force, and narrative authenticity in Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses* is particularly limited. The present study addresses this gap through close textual analysis of Nancy Roberts's translation, examining the strategies used to render dialect and colloquial expression and the cultural meanings preserved, altered, or lost. It asks, concretely, what happens to rural Palestinian speech when it crosses into English, and what that passage reveals about the possibilities and limits of translating dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic literature.

2. Literature Review

Arabic literary translation is not reducible to propositional transfer. Literary texts encode social values, historical experience, and narrative perspective through language varieties whose meanings exceed their individual words. Dialect and colloquialism, in particular, construct character identity, mark social and regional belonging, and sustain the oral texture of narrative worlds. Translation choices thus affect tone, characterization, ideological positioning, and reader interpretation, not just semantic accuracy.

This is especially acute in postcolonial Arabic literature, where non-standard speech routinely encodes memory, displacement, resistance, and collective identity, and where expressions are anchored in religion, honor, kinship, and political experience with no straightforward English equivalent. A translation may transmit the general message while discarding the emic cultural meaning the vernacular was built to carry (Al-Masri, 2009). Even accurate propositional transfer can leave interpersonal and ideological meaning—how identity, resistance, and nationalism are positioned for the reader—substantially altered (Zainab Al-Otoom, 2025). Translating Arabic dialect and colloquialism is therefore a problem of cultural transmission and narrative positioning as much as of lexis.

2.1 Diglossia, Register, and the Sociolinguistic Basis of Figurative Loss

Because postcolonial Arabic fiction routinely carries crucial social and affective meaning in colloquial rather than Standard Arabic, scholarship on diglossia and register offers a necessary explanatory base. Arabic prose commonly alternates Modern Standard Arabic narration with colloquial, regional, or hybrid dialogue, and this alternation indexes intimacy, class, authority, and political immediacy rather than serving as a stylistic flourish. Alhashmi's analysis of *The Queue* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* shows that register shift functions as a vehicle of political meaning tied to the Arab Spring and Iraq's colonial history, not as ornament. Khalaf's (2025) work on diglossia in translation similarly indicates that different strategies for rendering dialogue—normalizing into formal English versus retaining colloquial sociolectal texture—produce different social readings of the same characters. The implication for dialect translation is direct: the force and function of an utterance depend on whether it appears in a "high" or "low" register in the source, so register collapse in translation is itself a form of dialectal loss rather than a separate sociolinguistic issue.

This sensitivity of Arabic expressive force to structural features of the source language extends beyond register alone. ALYousef and Mahadi's (2019a) study of verbal emphasis in literary Arabic shows that emphatic repetition and intensifying structures perform pragmatic work that is frequently lost when translators default to unmarked English equivalents, paralleling the register-collapse problem at the level of syntax and emphasis rather than vocabulary. Their companion study of built-in repetition (ALYousef & Mahadi, 2019b) further demonstrates that Arabic's tolerance for lexical and structural repetition, often integral to rhetorical and emotional intensity, has no equivalent convention in English. Translators must therefore choose between preserving a repetition pattern that may read as stylistically excessive in English or normalizing it at the cost of rhetorical emphasis. Both studies reinforce the broader claim that expressive loss in Arabic-English translation extends beyond individual dialectal items to structural and prosodic features that carry comparable weight in shaping colloquial voice.

Empirical work on dialectal dialogue suggests that English translation tends to preserve conversational function more reliably than social identity. Almutairi (2022) shows that Saudi and Egyptian dialectal dialogue is not rendered through equivalent English regional varieties but through generic informal English, maintaining liveliness while discarding sociolinguistic specificity. Studies of *Girls of Riyadh* report a similar pattern: dialectal and idiomatic material is often omitted or flattened into formal English, with communicative translation prevailing over sustained foreignization or marked domestication (Ismail Mousa & Okleh Alhwamdeh, 2020; Mousa & Alhwamda, 2020; M. & Okleh, 2024), though this evidence is limited by its focus on a single novel. Overall, material tied to regional speech is disproportionately subject to functional reconstruction: the interactional effect of an utterance tends to survive translation more often than its social meaning.

Register-related findings are reinforced by work on code-switching and bilingual discourse. ALYousef et al. (2025b) show that Jordanian bilinguals alternate between Arabic and English to express identity, compensate for lexical gaps, and signal social positioning—functions structurally analogous to shifts between Standard and colloquial Arabic in literary dialogue. Although this work concerns spoken interaction rather than fiction, it underscores that variety choice is functionally motivated, not arbitrary. Translators who collapse such alternation into a single undifferentiated register risk losing precisely the identity-marking function the alternation is designed to perform. A related line of research examines how register and rhetorical choice operate persuasively in Arabic-English intercultural contexts. ALYousef et al. (2025a) show that Jordanian academic discourse relies on culturally specific configurations of ethos, logos, and pathos, and that translation between Arabic and English can itself function as a persuasive act rather than a neutral conduit. This dynamic is directly relevant to the ideological stakes of dialect and colloquial translation in postcolonial fiction.

2.2 Equivalence and Domestication: The Politics of Figurative Transfer

Equivalence theory is the standard starting point for analyzing dialect and colloquial transfer, but on its own it offers limited explanation of *why* particular choices are made. Nida's (1964) formal/dynamic equivalence distinction identifies the basic trade-off—fidelity to source form versus naturalness of target effect—but does not account for why translators resolve that trade-off differently across texts. Baker's (2018) multi-level model, spanning word, collocation, grammar, text, and pragmatics, is more precise diagnostically because it can locate where an expression fails to transfer, yet it remains mainly descriptive: it classifies loss without explaining the ideological motivation for a given solution. Toury's (1995) distinction between "adequacy" and "acceptability" adds this missing dimension by showing how translations are structurally pulled toward target-system norms, so that normalization of dialect and colloquialism is encouraged when literary institutions reward fluency and discourage linguistic strangeness. Arabic-specific challenges such as root-and-pattern morphology and dense collocational patterning further complicate these decisions (Ryding, 2005; Holes, 2004), but morphology alone cannot explain the cultural stakes of a dialectal choice.

Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization distinction provides the necessary cultural register by treating strategy as politically consequential rather than merely technical. Domestication assimilates the source text to target-culture norms and produces the "invisible" translator through fluent, transparent prose; foreignization preserves source-culture alterity at the cost of fluency and makes the translator's intervention visible. In postcolonial Arabic fiction, where translation operates within unequal power relations between languages and readerships (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2000; Shamma, 2009), this is a central stake: domesticating choices can strip dialect and colloquial speech of the historical and political texture that gave them literary purpose. Berman's account of the "destruction of vernacular networks of signification" as a deforming tendency in translation reinforces the point, treating vernacular language as a mode of being-in-language that binds a community to its world; when dialect is replaced by standard English, the text is partially dislocated from its communal ground.

Corpus-based work on "translation universals" strengthens the argument that normalization is a structural tendency rather than an idiosyncratic preference. Munday (2016) and others, building on Baker (1996), show that translated fiction often exhibits lower lexical variety, fewer non-standard syntactic patterns, and more conventional collocations than comparable original texts, a pattern described as a "law of growing standardization." These findings suggest that the normalization of dialect in literary translation is not merely an individual translator's choice but a systemic pressure embedded in the translation process itself. Cited strategy studies make this point concrete. In *The Queue*, Alharahsheh et al. (2024) coded 227 cultural references and found a dispersed use of strategies—modulation most frequent, followed by literal translation, explication, borrowing, synonymy, addition, deletion, and adaptation—indicating meaning-oriented compromise rather than uniform foreignization or domestication. Yousef's (2024) analysis of idioms in *Al Qurmiya* and *The Tree Stump* similarly shows paraphrase dominating, with omission rare and compensation used selectively. Al-Sharif and Al-Abbas (2025) report that strategy tracks semantic category—transliteration for names and material culture, paraphrase for religious terms, cultural substitution for idioms and proverbs—while Baawaidhan (2016) finds foreignization predominant for Sana'ani dialect. Taken together, these studies suggest that no single strategy dominates; choice is contingent on dialect, genre, translator, and cultural weight, in line with Venuti's view that foreignization is a strategic construction shaped by target-language conditions rather than an inherent textual property.

2.3 Narrative Theory and the Limits of Ideational Equivalence

Baker's (2006) narrative theory extends the analysis from strategy to ideology by treating translation as re-narration: translators do not reproduce statements but reconstruct the frameworks through which target readers come to understand identity and conflict. On this view, the decision to preserve, replace, or neutralize dialect and colloquial speech is never innocent, a claim with clear relevance to Palestinian and other postcolonial Arabic narratives in which everyday vocabulary is inseparable from the representation of resistance and collective memory (Suleiman, 2013). Dialect in such texts is not only a sociolinguistic marker but a narrative device through which particular histories and identities are made speakable.

Zainab's (2025) sociosemiotic study shows that translations often preserve ideational content but lose interpersonal and textual meaning—the social stance and narrative voice encoded in dialect and form. Paratext and circulation research further demonstrates that selection, titling, and framing can foreground Western expectations and stereotype Arab identities even when the sentence-level translation is competent, as in the case of *The Yacoubian Building*.

Related literary-critical work shows how postcolonial Arabic fiction encodes power, time, and displacement through figurative and vernacular means that are highly sensitive to translation. Abedalqader's (2025) study of Mohammed Rabie's *Otared* develops the idea of "necropolitical temporality" to describe how authoritarian regimes colonize memory, agency, and futurity, extending Mbembe's necropolitics and Foucault's governmentality into a temporal register. The novel encodes domination through historical erasure, present immobilization, and future foreclosure, and inscribes resistance through embodied, non-verbal acts—Otared's involuntary flashbacks, Zahra's sealed mouth, the burial of a rifle—that condense political meaning rather than stating it

directly. For translation, such condensed, often dialect-inflected resistance strategies raise a clear question: whether their local, embodied specificity will be preserved, softened, or flattened into generic English imagery.

Abedalqader et al.'s (2021) study of Arab Spring diasporic identity in Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing* offers a parallel case. They focus on Yazbek's metaphorical Arabic title *Bawwābāt Arḍ al-ʿAdam* ("Gates of Nothingness" or "Gateways into Non-Existence"), which condenses nihilism, devastation, and the collapse of state authority into a single spatial image and is reinforced by vernacular testimonies of an "internal" homeland-bound diaspora stripped of past and culture. Translating such title-level figures literally can dull their resonance; translating them too freely can serve the specific philosophical vocabulary anchoring the argument. These cases, though rooted in literary and postcolonial criticism rather than translation studies, support the claim that vernacular and non-standard language in postcolonial Arabic fiction are not ornamental but primary vehicles for political resistance, temporal domination, and diasporic identity—hence the stakes of their treatment in translation extend far beyond lexical accuracy.

Domesticated handling of dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic fiction is not just a linguistic choice; it shapes how texts circulate and how their political specificity is framed or flattened. This concern motivates the present study's combined use of equivalence theory, domestication/foreignization, narrative theory, and sociolinguistics.

Across work on dialect, register, equivalence, and cultural-political framing, the literature converges on a core claim: dialect and colloquial expression in postcolonial Arabic fiction are more often functionally reconstructed than directly reproduced in English. Translators tend to preserve conversationality and propositional content via informal English, paraphrase, modulation, borrowing, or compensation, while regional, social, and culturally embedded meanings are frequently omitted, normalized, or transformed. The consistent trade-off is that accessibility and conversational force grow as localized voice and cultural texture diminish.

This convergence remains largely descriptive. Existing studies document dialectal loss and normalization more than they explain, in integrated theoretical terms, why particular losses occur under particular conditions and how they play out in specific novels. Two gaps follow. First, no reviewed work combines equivalence, domestication/foreignization, and narrative theory in a single analytic procedure that shows where these three levels of assessment converge or diverge on the same dialectal or colloquial item. Second, no study examines Ibrahim Nasrallah's fiction in detail, leaving unexplored how his rural Palestinian speech, honor-bound formulas, and colloquial evaluative repertoire are redistributed in English. This paper addresses both gaps by applying an integrated framework to selected examples from *The Time of White Horses*, specifying which social and cultural meanings are preserved, weakened, or transformed as Nasrallah's dialect and colloquial voice pass through Nancy Roberts's English translation.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The present study draws upon an integrated theoretical framework situated at the intersection of translation studies, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial literary criticism. This multidisciplinary foundation enables a nuanced analysis of how dialect and colloquial expressions, central to the Palestinian social and cultural voice in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses*, are negotiated in Nancy Roberts's English translation. The framework comprises three tightly interrelated strands: (1) Baker's taxonomy of translation strategies and multi-level equivalence; (2) Venuti's conceptualization of domestication and foreignization as culturally loaded translation choices; and (3) scholarship on Arabic diglossia, register variation, and the sociolinguistic implications of translation loss. These strands are not treated as three independent checklists applied in isolation. On the contrary, they are deliberately held in productive tension, since a translation choice that satisfies Baker's criteria for pragmatic or textual equivalence may simultaneously constitute exactly the kind of domesticating erasure that Venuti's framework warns against. Together, they provide the analytical tools necessary to examine dialect translation not merely as linguistic transfer, but as a culturally and politically significant act of literary representation.

3.1 Baker's Translation Strategies and the Mechanics of Equivalence

Mona Baker's framework, as articulated in *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (1992/2018), offers a systematic model for analyzing how meaning is transferred across languages at multiple levels. It is particularly suited to the study of dialect and colloquial translation because it moves beyond word-for-word substitution to examine how translators negotiate equivalence at the lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels, treating equivalence not as a single, ideal state but as a relative, context-sensitive outcome that may be achieved at one level while being compromised at another.

At the lexical level, Baker identifies several strategies translators employ when encountering cultural or linguistic gaps between source and target texts, including translation by a more general word, by a more neutral or less expressive word, by cultural substitution, using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, by paraphrase, and by omission (Baker, 2018). In translating Palestinian rural speech, these strategies are highly relevant. Blessings, insults, kinship terms, and culturally embedded formulas

often lack direct equivalents in English; the translator must choose between retaining the local specificity of the expression, at the potential cost of reader accessibility, and replacing it with a more familiar English equivalent, at the cost of cultural texture. Roberts's handling of the exclamatory Palestinian idiom directed at Sumaya, "Ya kharab beitik ya Sumaya. Al-hablah bint Salim al-Daqar!," rendered as "O my heavens! That one! She's a disaster!," exemplifies translation by a more neutral, less expressive equivalent combined with cultural substitution: the literal image of a "ruined house," a formulaic expression of exasperated affection in Palestinian colloquial speech, is replaced by a generic English exclamation, achieving intelligibility while eliminating the kinship-and-household-centered idiom that anchors the insult in a specific communal register.

Grammatical equivalence, another crucial component of Baker's framework, addresses how differences in syntactic structure, negation, clause-linkage, tense, aspect, and word order affect meaning. Colloquial Arabic frequently employs patterns that diverge from both Modern Standard Arabic and standard English, including paratactic clause chaining joined by *wa* ("and"), non-standard negation, and elliptical or fragmentary structures typical of oral delivery (Dickins, Hervey, & Higgins, 2016). Analyzing how Roberts handles these features—whether by normalizing them into standard, hypotactically subordinated English syntax or by preserving some trace of colloquial looseness—illuminates the extent to which the source text's social voice is maintained or erased. For example, Roberts's translation of the coffee-preparation passage describing Hamdan's mortar-and-pestle rhythms ("Every time he ground coffee for a guest, Hamdan would come up with a special rhythm suited to the occasion...") restructures a source sentence built on Arabic's characteristic paratactic coordination into a fluent, hypotactically organized English sentence, a grammatical-level choice that improves readability for Anglophone readers while smoothing over the oral, list-like cadence of the Arabic original.

Baker's concept of pragmatic equivalence is perhaps the most critical component of her framework for this study. Pragmatic equivalence concerns the ability of the translation to convey the intended force of speech acts—that is, how utterances function in context, rather than merely what they denote propositionally (Baker, 2018). Colloquial expressions, blessings, and insults are heavily pragmatic; their meaning is inseparable from their social performative force. A rural Palestinian blessing does not merely communicate a wish for well-being; it enacts a social relationship rooted in specific communal norms of hospitality and status. This is evident in the formulaic hospitality exchange between Shaykh Nasir al-Ali and Hajj Mahmud: "Drink your coffee, Shaykh Nasir," to which the reply is, "We will drink it, God willing. May God prolong the days of your prosperity and protect you and your household! But we have a request." Roberts's translation succeeds in reproducing the pragmatic force of the exchange—an elaborate, ritualized display of hospitality and deference that precedes and licenses the delegation's actual request—even though the blessing formula is rendered relatively literally rather than replaced with an English equivalent. This illustrates that pragmatic equivalence and lexical foreignness are not mutually exclusive: the speech act can function properly even when its wording remains culturally marked.

Applied consistently across these levels, Baker's framework allows the study to classify each instance of dialect or colloquial translation according to specific strategies: literal translation, cultural substitution, paraphrase, borrowing (retaining the Arabic term, transliterated, with or without gloss), omission, or compensation (recovering lost meaning or effect elsewhere in the text). As such, Baker's model is indispensable for giving the analysis micro-level descriptive precision. It is, however, treated as necessary but insufficient. Baker can show that a translator paraphrased rather than substituted, or omitted rather than compensated, but she does not on her own explain why a translator would systematically favor one strategy over another, nor does she address the cumulative ideological effect of patterned choices on the representation of a postcolonial rural community. This is the gap that Venuti's framework is introduced to fill.

3.2 Venuti's Domestication and Foreignization: Cultural Politics of Translation

While Baker's model illuminates the mechanics of translation, Lawrence Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization addresses the cultural and ethical implications of those mechanics. Venuti (1995) traces his distinction to Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1813 lecture, which proposes that a translator can either "leave the author in peace, as much as possible, and move the reader towards him," or "leave the reader in peace, as much as possible, and move the author towards him" (Schleiermacher, as cited in Venuti, 1995, p. 19). Venuti explicitly endorses foreignization, following Antoine Berman's argument that it constitutes an ethics of translation resisting what Venuti calls the "ethnocentric violence" of domestication—"an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (Venuti, 1995, p. 20).

Crucially, Venuti grounds this ethical argument in a direct critique of Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence, the concept underpinning much equivalence-based translation pedagogy, including aspects of Baker's approach. Venuti observes that Nida's insistence on "complete naturalness of expression" and eliciting "a response similar to that of the original receptors" is not ideologically neutral, but "impos[es] the English-language valorization of transparent discourse on every foreign culture," masking domestication as fidelity (Nida, 1964, as cited in Venuti, 1995, pp. 21–22). For the present study, this means that Baker's

equivalence model and Venuti's domestication/foreignization axis are not two harmonious lenses operating at different levels; they exist in genuine theoretical tension. A translation choice that Baker would classify as achieving strong pragmatic equivalence through paraphrase or cultural substitution—such as rendering “ya kharab beitik” as “O my heavens! That one! She’s a disaster!”—is, from Venuti’s perspective, simultaneously an instance of precisely the fluent, ethnocentric domestication his framework was built to expose.

Venuti also insists that “the foreign in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current target-language situation” (Venuti, 1995, p. 20). Foreignization, in other words, cannot be measured simply by counting retained Arabic loanwords; it must be assessed against what would count, in contemporary Anglophone literary publishing, as a genuine disruption of fluency. Applied to Roberts’s translation, this means that her retention of terms such as *dalla* alongside minimal explanation constitutes a foreignizing choice only insofar as it departs from the unmarked alternative of assimilating the term into a familiar English equivalent, such as “coffee pot.” Venuti’s related notion of “symptomatic reading,” which locates a translation’s underlying ideological orientation in discontinuities of diction, syntax, or register rather than in an assumed stable “meaning” of the source (Venuti, 1995, pp. 24–25), authorizes this study’s attention to shifts between standardized and dialect-marked English in Roberts’s text as diagnostic rather than incidental.

In this study, Venuti’s framework serves as the evaluative lens through which Roberts’s micro-level strategy choices are situated within the macro-level cultural politics of representation. It asks whether her handling of dialect and colloquial speech overall leans toward domestication—reducing colloquial intensity and normalizing dialectal features into accessible standard English—or toward foreignization—preserving the distinctiveness of the Palestinian rural voice even at the cost of immediate reader comfort. Importantly, consistent with Venuti’s own caveats, foreignization is not presumed inherently superior, nor domestication inherently defective. Rather, Venuti’s categories provide a critical vocabulary for examining the cultural politics embedded in translation decisions and for assessing how those decisions contribute to, or complicate, the global circulation of Palestinian postcolonial narratives.

3.3 Arabic Diglossia, Register, and Translation Loss

The third theoretical strand draws upon scholarship in Arabic sociolinguistics, particularly diglossia and the relationship between register and social identity. Ferguson’s (1959) classic definition of diglossia describes the coexistence of a “high” variety (Modern Standard Arabic) and “low” varieties (regional dialects) within a single speech community, with each variety associated with different domains of use. Ryding (2005) and Badawi (1973) refine this picture into a continuum of levels, from Classical and Modern Standard Arabic through educated spoken and semi-literary forms to illiterate colloquial varieties. This graded model is especially useful for literary analysis because it captures the fine gradation of register choice—formal narration, cultivated speech, and rural colloquial dialogue—that Nasrallah exploits in *The Time of White Horses* more precisely than a strict high/low binary.

The asymmetry between Arabic’s diglossic structure and English’s comparatively less stratified register system matters directly for translation. When Nasrallah deploys Palestinian rural colloquial speech within an MSA narrative frame, he is making a marked literary choice: invoking the Low variety’s associations with authenticity, rural community, and oral tradition against the High variety’s associations with formal narration and historical authority. English lacks a structurally equivalent High/Low split. Dickins, Hervey, and Higgins (2016) argue that this absence is “one of the most intractable and unavoidable problems” in Arabic-English literary translation, because whatever strategy the translator adopts—leveling all speech into one English register, importing non-standard English dialects, or employing partial lexical and grammatical marking—some aspect of the Arabic sociolinguistic system is lost or distorted. Either the register contrast disappears, producing diglossic flattening, or target-language dialects introduce social meanings specific to English that do not correspond to the source text’s system. Hatim and Munday (2004) warn against superficial geographic analogies in such cases, noting that a marked source-text dialect should be rendered according to comparable social function rather than geographic parallelism.

Register theory, developed in Hallidayan systemic-functional linguistics and extended to translation by Hatim and Mason (1990), complements diglossia by treating register as the co-variation of linguistic form with field (subject matter), tenor (social relationship), and mode (channel). Applied to Nasrallah’s novel, colloquial features of village dialogue—kinship address terms, religiously formulaic blessings and curses, proverbial speech, syntactic informality—function as register markers indexing tenor: they signal social relationships of intimacy, hierarchy, obligation, and communal solidarity specific to rural Palestinian village life. When such markers are translated into standardized English register, the social relationships and identity positions they encode are not merely stylistically flattened but substantively altered for the English reader.

The concept of translation loss, understood not as translator failure but as a structural condition of interlingual transfer (Dickins et al., 2016), provides the final sociolinguistic instrument this framework requires. Dickins et al. distinguish connotative meaning

(associative, non-literal meanings, including social-register connotation), collocative meaning (meaning arising from habitual co-occurrence of words in a given register), and dialect meaning (socially indexical meaning carried by the variety itself). This taxonomy allows the present study to specify, for each examined passage, whether propositional content is preserved while connotative or dialect-indexical meaning is lost—the pattern the literature suggests is most common—or whether loss extends further.

3.4 Synthesis of the Framework and Methodology

These three strands—Baker's equivalence strategies, Venuti's domestication/foreignization continuum, and sociolinguistic work on Arabic diglossia and register—are brought together in a single analytic procedure rather than used in isolation. Baker's taxonomy provides the micro-tools for tracking what Roberts does with each expression or speech act: which strategy (literal translation, substitution, paraphrase, borrowing, omission, compensation) is used, and at which level (word, grammar, text, pragmatics) equivalence is achieved or compromised. Venuti's framework then places these choices within the macro-politics of translation, asking whether the English text as a whole assimilates or preserves source-culture difference, and highlighting cases where strong pragmatic equivalence is secured through clearly domesticating means.

The sociolinguistic layer specifies the social meaning of the dialectal features in each example, showing why the loss or reshaping of colloquial forms is not merely stylistic but directly affects voice, identity, and representation, given Arabic's diglossic structure and the lack of an exact English counterpart. By tying each decision back to diglossia and register, dialectal loss is treated as loss of sociolinguistic function, not just of colorful wording.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive-comparative design consistent with this integrated framework. Selected passages from *The Time of White Horses* containing rural speech, blessings, insults, exclamations, kinship terms, and culturally embedded formulas are examined in three stages. First, a Baker-level analysis aligns the Arabic source with Roberts's translation, classifying each instance by strategy and identifying the level(s) at which equivalence is achieved or lost. Second, a Venuti-level analysis gauges the cultural-political orientation of the same choices, asking whether Palestinian rural speech is assimilated to Anglophone norms or allowed to remain distinctive, with special attention to cases where fluency and equivalence coexist with cultural erasure. Third, a sociolinguistic analysis applies diglossia, register, and Dickins et al.'s categories of translation loss (connotative, collocative, dialect meaning) to measure the kind and degree of social meaning preserved, transformed, or lost.

This tension-aware procedure moves beyond isolated lexical comparison and simple accuracy judgments. It offers a theoretically grounded account of how translating dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic fiction becomes a culturally charged process that shapes voice, identity, and the cross-cultural circulation of Palestinian narratives, with the most revealing results expected where Baker-style equivalence and Venuti-style domestication or foreignization pull in different directions.

4. Discussion and Findings

This section presents the analytical findings of the study by examining how Roberts renders selected instances of dialect and colloquialism in *The Time of White Horses* into English. Each example is discussed through the combined lens of Baker's strategies and levels of equivalence, Venuti's domestication/foreignization continuum, and sociolinguistic accounts of diglossia and register. The goal is not simply to identify "accurate" or "inaccurate" translations, but to show how specific choices reshape Palestinian rural voice, social relations, and cultural meaning in English. The discussion is organized into four thematic subsections—hospitality and coffee ritual, praise/blessings/curses, kinship and gendered social roles, and rural material culture—followed by an overall synthesis of the patterns that emerge.

4.1 Hospitality and coffee ritual

Coffee preparation and serving in *The Time of White Horses* are not neutral background actions; they function as socially coded rituals that index respect, hierarchy, and communal belonging. Roberts's translation of these scenes shows how hospitality can be preserved as a social act while its village-specific voice is partially normalized.

ST: أفرغ حمدان ما في الدلال من قهوة، عند طرف حوش المضافة، وعاد، ولحظات وتصادع صوت مهباشه. (Nasrallah, p. 29)

TT: "Hamdan went to the edge of the guesthouse courtyard, where he poured out the old coffee that was in the dalla. Within moments of his return, the sound of his mortar and pestle was wafting through the air." (Roberts, p. 36)

In this example, Roberts retains *dalla* through borrowing and surrounds it with paraphrase and descriptive expansion to keep the scene accessible in English. In Baker's terms, this is a compensatory strategy: the culturally marked object name is preserved because no exact English equivalent carries the same local associations, while its potential opacity is offset by explaining the

action in more general English. From Venuti's perspective, the choice is structurally mixed. The transliterated *dalla* has a foreignizing effect, but the explanatory framing domestically absorbs the passage into fluent English prose, revealing a tension between maintaining cultural distinctiveness and ensuring readability.

Socio-linguistically, the Arabic does more than name an object; it embeds coffee preparation in a village oral register where material culture, gesture, and speech are tightly linked. The English translation keeps the referential meaning but reduces the spoken cadence and rustic density of the source, shifting emphasis from the oral and relational texture of the scene to the object itself. The critical implication is that Roberts favors communicative transparency over strong vernacular preservation. The passage becomes easier for Anglophone readers to process, yet the broader Palestinian rural voice is weakened, illustrating a common pattern in the translation of colloquial Arabic: cultural items may be retained, but the oral world that surrounds them is often reconfigured into smoother, less socially marked English.

ST: في كل مرة كان حمدان يبتكر إيقاعاً لدقات مهباشه، حتى ليكاد المرء أن يعرف من هو الضيف، ما هي مكانته، ما إذا كان قادماً في سبيل غاية تفرح، أم حاملاً أخباراً لا تسر. (Nasrallah, p. 29)

TT: "Every time he ground coffee for a guest, Hamdan would come up with a special rhythm suited to the occasion. Consequently, one could almost determine who the visitor was, what status he occupied, and whether he had come bearing news that was happy or sad, from the sounds that emerged from Hamdan's mortar and pestle." Roberts, p.36)

In this example, Roberts again relies on paraphrase and syntactic restructuring to render the Arabic into fluent English. Rather than preserving the sentence's rhythmically layered phrasing, she expands and reorganizes the information into a more explicit logical sequence. In Baker's terms, this is a clear case of paraphrase at the lexical and textual levels: the translation does not attempt to reproduce the source's oral density or incremental accumulation of meaning, but re-expresses the content in a way that is easier for English readers to process. Additions such as "special rhythm suited to the occasion" and the linking "Consequently" increase transparency while reframing the passage as descriptive prose rather than spoken narrative.

From Venuti's perspective, the rendering is strongly domesticating. The English absorbs the Arabic into a polished narrative style that conforms to Anglophone expectations of clarity and coherence; visible traces of the original syntactic flow and gradual buildup largely disappear. The translation is accurate in content, but it privileges readability over the retention of the source text's rhetorical distinctiveness, moving the reader toward a familiar English prose norm rather than toward the unfamiliar structure of the Arabic.

At the level of diglossia and register, the Arabic sentence belongs to a socially meaningful oral register in which repetition, pacing, and the link between the mortar's rhythm and the guest's identity reflect a communal, village-based way of speaking. The English version preserves the informational content, but the oral cadence is subdued and the colloquial atmosphere less audible. What is lost is not the basic meaning, but the subtle performative link between sound, speech, and social interpretation that characterizes the original.

The critical finding is that Roberts successfully conveys the social logic of the coffee ritual—Hamdan's grinding rhythm reveals the guest's status and purpose—yet she does so by transforming a rhythmically shaped oral passage into a more explanatory sentence. The translation therefore preserves meaning and narrative clarity at the cost of reducing the poem-like social resonance of the Arabic, making this a strong example of how domesticating translation can retain function while diminishing the stylistic and communal force of dialectal speech.

ST: هزّ أحدهم رأسه بحزن: أنا طارق بن الشيخ محمد. ما بكم يا رجال، أرجو الله ألا يكون قد أصابكم مكروه أو حلّ بكم ظلم أو أصابكم دم أهلاً بكم في بيتكم. السعداء، وهؤلاء إخواني وأولاد عمي.

حياك الله يا ابن الكرام.

(زمن الخيول البيضاء، ص29). ما تريدونه وصلكم، ما عليكم إلا أن تشيروا إلى مطلبكم. قال الحاج محمود

TT: "What's wrong, men?" queried Hajj Mahmud. "I hope to God you haven't suffered some calamity or injustice, and that no one's blood has been shed among you."

One of them shook his head sadly and said, "I am Tariq, the son of Shaykh Muhammad Sa'adat. The men with me are my brothers and my paternal cousins."

"Welcome to your house," replied Hajj Mahmud.

"May God grant you life, you son of the noble and generous."

"Whatever you seek is yours. All you have to do is tell me what your request is," said Hajj Mahmud. (Roberts, p.37)

In this example, Roberts renders the Arabic greeting and concern formula through a combination of literal translation and slight paraphrase, preserving the main speech act while making the sentence flow naturally in English. In Baker's terms, the translation is relatively close to the source at the level of propositional meaning: concern for the men's safety and the possibility of injustice or bloodshed is clearly retained. At the same time, the blessing-like opening and ritualized concern are not reproduced as strongly marked oral formulas; they are recast in direct English prose, so the social function of the utterance is preserved through a smoother, more accessible lexical pattern.

From Venuti's perspective, this is a mixed strategy. It is foreignizing insofar as the structure of the Arabic hospitality formula remains recognisable, especially in the sequence of concern, blessing, and invitation. However, it is also domesticating because the English wording is fluent and idiomatic, reducing the sense that the reader is encountering a distinctly Palestinian oral formula. The translation does not confront the reader with the strangeness of the source; it guides them into a readable equivalent that conveys respect without preserving strong foreignness.

At the level of diglossia and register, Arabic belongs to a formal communal speech register in which hospitality is performative rather than merely polite, binding speaker and guest within a code of mutual honour. Roberts's English version retains respect and concern, but the repeated ceremonial pattern is reduced and the dense social etiquette becomes less audible. The village voice is still present, yet less marked by the ritual rhythms that organize the exchange.

The critical finding is that Roberts successfully preserves hospitality as a social act, but weakens the formulaic village voice in the process. The exchange remains fully meaningful to English readers, yet its ceremonial density and colloquial rootedness are softened, making this a clear example of a translation that prioritizes communicative clarity and pragmatic equivalence while partially sacrificing the oral texture that gives the Arabic greeting its cultural force.

ST:

دارت القهوة، أمسك الشيخ ناصر العلي رئيس الجاهة بفنجانها، وضعه على الطاولة التي أمامه. كما فعل الرجال القادمون معه اشرب قهوتك يا شيخ. قال أبو سليم. نشرها إن شاء الله، أدام الله عزك وحفظ بيتك عامراً. ولكن لنا طلباً (Nasrallah, p. 15)

TT: "The coffee was served. Shaykh Nasir al-Ali, as head of the delegation, took his cup and placed it on the table before him, and the men who had come with him followed suit. 'Drink your coffee, Shaykh Nasir,' said Abu Salim. 'We will drink it, God willing. May God prolong the days of your prosperity and protect you and your household! But we have a request.'" (Roberts, p. 17)

Roberts's translation is here mainly literal, with a clear pragmatic transfer of blessing and request. Under Baker's framework, equivalence is strong at the level of speech act: the invitation, deferential refusal to drink immediately, blessing, and polite introduction of the request all survive in English. The wording is relatively direct, but the social sequence of the exchange is preserved, making this a strong example of pragmatic translation. From Venuti's viewpoint, the passage is moderately foreignizing because the blessing formula and delegation ritual remain visible, yet the English syntax is smooth enough to be easily accessible, which keeps domestication in play.

In terms of diglossia and register, Arabic is highly ritualized and socially specific: coffee is embedded in a culturally coded negotiation of respect and obligation. Roberts keeps the meaning and structure of the exchange, but the stylized village cadence is somewhat reduced. The critical finding is that the passage works very well as a communicative translation. It maintains the ritual structure and pragmatic force of the Arabic hospitality exchange, even though it softens the colloquial richness and oral density of the original.

Taken together, these four examples show that Roberts consistently preserves the social logic of hospitality and coffee ritual—who speaks, who is honored, who is worried—but often does so through domesticating strategies that normalize the oral and village-specific texture of the source. Borrowing and partial foreignization (as in *dalla* and explicit blessing formulas) keep some cultural markers, yet the rhythm, repetition, and communal cadence through which coffee rituals structure village life are frequently smoothed into fluent English prose.

4.2 Praise, blessings, and curses

Praise, blessings, and curses in *The Time of White Horses* are not incidental emotional outbursts; they are highly patterned speech acts through which social judgment, affection, shame, and protection are articulated in village life. Roberts's translation of these expressions shows how emotional and evaluative meaning can be preserved while the idiomatic and dialectal edge of the original is often softened.

ST: يا خراب بيتك يا سمية. الهيلة بنت سالم الدقر!! (Nasrallah, p. 232)

TT: "O my heavens! That one! She's a disaster!" (Roberts, p.257)

In this example, Roberts renders the Arabic insult through paraphrase and cultural substitution rather than literal transfer. In Baker's terms, she does not attempt to carry over the household-based image of "ruined house"; instead, she replaces it with a generic English exclamation and evaluative comment that signal annoyance and condemnation. The strategy preserves the pragmatic function of the utterance as a strong rebuke, but removes the local metaphor that ties the insult to domestic space and kinship. From Venuti's perspective, this is a clearly domesticating solution: the culturally embedded Palestinian idiom is converted into a familiar English complaint, so the reader encounters emotional force without encountering the foreign structure of the insult.

At the level of diglossia and register, the Arabic expression belongs to an intensely colloquial village register in which household imagery and kin relations are central to everyday speech. The phrase "يا خراب بيتك" sounds socially embedded and verbally sharp, marking Sumaya as both exasperating and intimately known. The English "O my heavens! ... She's a disaster!" keeps the emotional content but loses the household-centred social imagery and idiomatic edge that characterize the original. The critical finding is that Roberts preserves the insult's communicative effect but erases much of its Palestinian village flavour, prioritizing readability and emotional equivalence over idiomatic structure.

Beyond the immediate insult, this example is revealing for the broader argument because it shows how Roberts tends to preserve affective content while simplifying socially embedded imagery. The Arabic phrase ties Sumaya's behaviour directly to the imagined collapse of the household, reflecting a rural worldview in which moral failure is felt through the vulnerability of domestic space. Replacing this culturally dense metaphor with a generic "disaster" aligns with Baker's notion of communicative success, but also illustrates Venuti's concern that domestication can strip away the "vernacular networks of signification" that give postcolonial texts their local weight. In terms of diglossia and register, the English moves the utterance toward standard conversational style and away from the rural colloquial repertoire in which household metaphors are part of everyday judgment. As such, the example becomes emblematic of a wider tendency in the translation: it keeps the anger and rebuke audible, but makes the Palestinian village voice less distinctive in English.

الله يعين زوجك عليك، الله يعينه. والله لو طلب مني أن أزوجه غيرك. عندما انقضت عليها صائحة: يا ويلي، زوجها لتبيض وجهنا، فإذا بها مصيبة (زمن الخيول البيضاء، ص37). لزوجته، وطرقت الباب وخرجت

"At that point, she tore into me with everything she had: 'Lord, have mercy! We married you off to give ourselves a good reputation, and here you are, a disaster! God help your husband! God help him! I swear to God, if he asked me to marry him to somebody else, I'd do it!' "Then she stalked out and slammed the door behind her!" (*Time of White Horses*, p.45)

In this example, Roberts uses a mixture of paraphrase and relatively close rendering to carry the Arabic sequence of lament, reproach, and blessing into English. In Baker's terms, she preserves the composite speech act of the rebuke—shaming the daughter for failing to uphold the family's reputation, invoking the husband's suffering, and threatening hypothetical remarriage—while reorganizing the syntax into more direct English clauses. The emotional escalation is maintained: the mother moves from complaint ("We married you off to give ourselves a good reputation") to strong evaluation ("here you are, a disaster") and finally to conditional threat ("if he asked me to marry him to somebody else, I'd do it"), so the pragmatic functions of the utterance remain intact even as its form is reshaped for Anglophone readability.

From Venuti's perspective, the passage is mixed but leaning domesticating. The repeated invocations "Lord, have mercy!" and "God help your husband!" retain some of the source's religious and emotional cadence, hinting at the way prayer and curse intertwine in everyday speech, yet the English is highly fluent and narrative-friendly. The outburst is absorbed into a familiar first-person storytelling voice rather than presented as a markedly foreign speech pattern. The translation does not foreground its own foreignness; it integrates the mother's tirade into accessible English discourse, reducing the linguistic estrangement the original might have produced.

At the level of diglossia and register, the Arabic combines lament, prayer, insult, and social shame in a strongly colloquial voice anchored in village honour codes. The mother's words draw on shared understandings of reputation ("التبيض وجهنا") and marital obligation, and her blessing-curses ("الله يعين زوجك عليك") situate the scene firmly within a rural speech community where religious formulas are part of everyday reproach. In English, the sequence and social pressure are preserved, but the layered oral texture is thinner: the rhythm, repetition, and short colloquial bursts are simplified into smoother narrative sentences, making the voice more literary and less distinctly oral.

The critical finding is that Roberts can successfully convey emotional escalation and social function while softening the dialectal edge of the speech. The daughter's failure, the mother's anger, and the husband's precarious position are all clear in English, and the social stakes of the scene are inferable. However, the translation turns a highly situated, gendered village voice—where a mother's dialectal rebuke carries generational authority and communal judgement—into a more generalized "angry mother" voice in standard English. The passage thus works as a readable emotional equivalent rather than a full register-preserving transfer, reinforcing the broader claim that Roberts tends to preserve what colloquial speech does, while reducing some of the ways in which it sounds and signals local identity

(Nasrallah, p.13) (إنكسر الشر: قالت: أمه تهشم الصحن،

"His mother Munira heard the sound of shattering porcelain. "The evil's been broken!" she exclaimed." (Time of White Horses, p.16)

In this example, Roberts opts for a largely literal translation with minimal adaptation. Under Baker's framework, this indicates that she treats the phrase as semantically transparent enough to be carried over almost directly: the Arabic blessing "إنكسر الشر" becomes "The evil's been broken!", preserving both the core image (evil as something that can be shattered) and the protective function of the utterance. Rather than paraphrasing or substituting a more general English expression, she keeps the metaphor intact, allowing the translated line to carry similar propositional and pragmatic meaning to the source.

From Venuti's perspective, this choice is mildly foreignizing. Roberts could have replaced the phrase with an idiomatic English proverb ("That's the end of our troubles," "The bad luck is gone"), but instead she retains the source-language metaphor in a slightly marked English form. The expression feels unusual but comprehensible, inviting the reader to recognize a culturally specific way of conceptualizing misfortune. The blessing is not fully assimilated into standard English usage; some of the foreignness of the idiom remains visible.

At the level of diglossia and register, Arabic functions as a ritualized colloquial blessing embedded in everyday village superstition and belief. It belongs to a low, oral register in which speech acts are used to ward off harm and celebrate relief from danger. The English preserves this protective speech act and situational function—the breaking of the plate is read as a sign that "evil" has been broken—but the phrase sits slightly outside ordinary English colloquial usage, maintaining a trace of the village's ritual language.

The critical finding is that this translation is relatively effective for the goals of the study: it keeps the cultural function of the idiom visible and intelligible, allowing the reader to sense the celebratory relief embedded in the phrase even if full idiomatic familiarity is not reproduced. Unlike more heavily domesticated cases, Roberts here leans toward preserving the source idiom rather than smoothing it entirely. Example 16 therefore stands as a useful counterpoint to the general domestication trend, illustrating that certain blessings can survive in English with their metaphor largely intact and that foreignizing choices can coexist alongside a predominantly fluent translation style.

(Nasrallah, p. 38) (إنكسر الشر: قالت: أمه تهشم الصحن،

"Curses on whoever finalized your marriage contract!" (Roberts, p. 46)

In this example, Roberts handles the curse through paraphrase, converting a highly idiomatic Arabic expletive into an explicit English explanation. In Baker's terms, she preserves both the target of the curse (the person who finalized the marriage contract) and its general content (damnation), but abandons the compact, colloquial structure of "إنكسر الشر". Rather than carry over the syntactic shape and idiomatic sequencing, she rephrases it in a more analytic form: "Curses on whoever finalized your marriage contract!"—a clear preference for semantic and pragmatic equivalence over formal or idiomatic equivalence.

From Venuti's perspective, the choice is clearly domesticating. The curse is made clear and accessible, but the foreignness of its formulation is largely removed. The Arabic expression would sound sharper and more abrupt, with an idiomatic rhythm and social tone characteristic of vernacular rebuke; the English, by contrast, spells out the target and context in a more explicit, almost legalistic way ("finalized your marriage contract"), smoothing the utterance into a standard register. The reader receives the meaning without being confronted with the unfamiliar syntactic pattern and condensed aggression of the original.

Socio-linguistically, Arabic belongs to aggressive, vernacular speech, sounding like something shouted in frustration and carrying a sense of sudden, everyday verbal violence. The English "Curses on whoever finalized your marriage contract!" is understandable, yet it feels more formal and less spontaneously oral; it reads more like a declarative statement than an eruption of dialectal voice. The critical finding is that while the translation successfully communicates who is being cursed and why, it softens both the idiomatic violence and spoken immediacy of the original. Roberts again prioritizes clarity and explicitness over preservation of dialectal sting, confirming the broader pattern in this subsection: emotional and evaluative meaning is carried across, but the local shape and sound of that emotion are reorganized into smoother, less marked English prose.

Taken together with the above examples, this example reinforces the subsection finding: across these four cases, Roberts systematically preserves emotional content and pragmatic function—insult, rebuke, blessing, and curse—while frequently reshaping idiomatic and dialectal form into more accessible English. In terms of Baker's strategies, paraphrase and cultural substitution dominate, with occasional literal rendering where idioms can survive in English without heavy adaptation. Through Venuti's lens, the overall tendency is toward domestication, though there are moments of mild foreignization (as in "The evil's been broken!") where the original image is retained. At the diglossic and register level, the socially embedded village voice remains audible in meaning but less so in texture: the sharpness, rhythm, and everyday oral quality of Palestinian colloquial speech are often softened into fluent English, confirming that emotional equivalence is achieved more readily than full dialectal preservation.

4.3 Kinship, gender, and social roles

Kinship terms, gendered labels, and role descriptions in *The Time of White Horses* are central to how the novel constructs social identity and family hierarchy. Colloquial formulations signal respect, intimacy, authority, and communal expectations. Roberts's translation of these expressions shows how she preserves relational meaning while often standardizing the local idiom and register through which kinship and gender are voiced.

لقد فُكِّرتُ كثيراً، وقلت لنفسي، إذا ما تصبَّحوا وتمسَّوا بوجه منير كوجهها، فإنهم سيذكروننا بالخير دائماً، (Nasrallah, p. 35)

"If her in-laws see a bright face like hers when they wake up in the morning and before they go to bed at night, they'll always remember us with kind thoughts." (Roberts, p. 43)

Here Roberts uses paraphrase to render a blessing-like domestic evaluation into clear English. In Baker's terms, the speech act—a hope that the daughter's presence will earn perpetual goodwill from her in-laws—is preserved, but the Arabic's compact, oral phrasing "يَتَصَبَّحُوا وَتَمَسُّوا بِوَجْهِ مَنْيَرٍ كَوَجْهِهَا" is expanded into a more explicit temporal frame ("when they wake up in the morning and before they go to bed at night"). The evaluative logic is carried across, yet the source's rhythmic pairing of morning and evening, embedded in colloquial blessing, is reorganized into standard English prose. From Venuti's perspective, this is a domesticating move: the line reads as a smooth statement of family reputation rather than as a marked colloquial blessing.

At the level of diglossia and register, the Arabic belongs to domestic kinship talk, where the daughter's "bright face" functions as a social asset within the in-laws' household. The expression is rooted in a rural register that links embodied presence (the face) to ongoing goodwill. The English keeps the idea that the daughter's presence will make her in-laws "remember us with kind thoughts," but the oral, formulaic quality of the blessing is weakened. The critical finding is that Roberts preserves the kinship-related meaning—that the daughter's marriage reflects back on her parents—yet she softens the local idiomatic texture that makes the utterance sound like village domestic speech.

إِرْكُزْ يَا وَلَد. قالت منيرة. لكنها كانت فرحة بفرحه (Nasrallah, p. 17)

"Settle down, boy," Munira said, although she was happy to see him so happy. (Time of White Horses, p. 21)

In this example, Roberts opts for a functional equivalent, rendering the colloquial command "إِرْكُزْ يَا وَلَد" as "Settle down, boy." In Baker's framework, this is a straightforward pragmatic transfer: the directive force of the utterance is preserved, and the English reads naturally. She does not try to maintain the exact Arabic verb or its phonological shape, but she reproduces the interpersonal effect of an older relative gently checking an excited child. From Venuti's perspective, this is a domesticating solution, since the English command is unmarked and fits seamlessly into everyday English dialogue.

Socio-linguistically, however, Arabic carries a specific oral quality and a familiar tone that situates Munira as both authoritative and affectionate. The form "يَا وَلَد" is a common colloquial vocative that signals both intimacy and hierarchy. The English "boy" retains some sense of informality and age difference, but the local register and rhythm of the Arabic vocative are less distinct. The critical finding is that Roberts succeeds in keeping the kinship relationship and emotional tone clear, but the particular sound of rural maternal/elder voice is generalized into a more universal "family talk" in English.

قلت: حتى تعرف أن ابنتها ست بيت (Nasrallah, p. 37)

"This way she'll know that her daughter has turned into a first-rate housewife!" (Roberts, p. 45)

Here Roberts employs cultural substitution and paraphrase. In Baker's terms, the Arabic social label "ست بيت" is rendered as "first-rate housewife," a phrase that captures domestic competence but does not fully match the layered socio-cultural implications of the original. The strategy preserves the evaluative meaning—the speaker wants the mother-in-law to recognize the daughter's excellence in domestic responsibilities—but transposes it into an English gendered category that is familiar to Anglophone readers. Rather than attempt a calque or literal rendering that might sound opaque ("a lady of the house"), Roberts chooses a term that signals both quality and role in English. From Baker's perspective, this is a typical case of equivalence at the level of pragmatic effect: the compliment functions as praise of feminine domestic identity in both languages, even though the lexical choices differ.

Seen through Venuti's framework, however, the choice is clearly domesticating. The culturally specific Arabic label "ست بيت" is replaced by a generalized English term that carries similar gendered connotations but not the same cultural depth. The foreignness of the expression—the way it belongs to a particular rural Arab discourse of womanhood—is smoothed out, and the reader is invited to interpret the character through an Anglophone category ("housewife") that brings its own ideological baggage. The translation thus moves the source text toward target-culture norms, making it easier to read but also subtly reconfiguring how femininity and domestic authority are imagined.

At the level of diglossia and register, "ست بيت" functions as a socially loaded compliment in rural Arabic, encoding not just housework skills but a respected feminine identity within the household economy and communal hierarchy. It is part of a local evaluative vocabulary that distinguishes women who successfully embody the role of the household's moral and practical center. The English "first-rate housewife" preserves the praise but introduces resonance with contemporary English debates about gender and domestic work, including associations with mid-20th-century Anglophone ideals of the "housewife," which are not identical to the source context. This shift means that the reader may understand the daughter's role through Western images of domesticity rather than through the specific Palestinian rural matrix of honor, labor, and family reputation.

Critically, this example illustrates how Roberts successfully conveys evaluation and gendered social role while simultaneously weakening the local idiomatic nuance and repositioning the expression within Anglophone discourses. In terms of the paper's larger argument, it shows that gendered praise in dialect is particularly vulnerable to domestication: the interpersonal meaning travels across languages, but the culturally specific label through which that meaning is voiced is replaced by a broader target-language category. As a result, the character's identity remains legible—she is clearly valued as a competent wife—but the particular Palestinian rural script of "ست بيت" becomes less sharply audible, confirming that social roles, like insults and blessings, are often normalized into English even when their evaluative force is preserved.

لكن شنارة، داية البلد أكّدت لهم ما إن حضرت (هذه المسألة لا تتعلق بجنينها) (Nasrallah, p. 21)

"However, when Shinnara, the village midwife, came to check on her, she assured them that it had nothing to do with the child she was carrying." (Roberts, p. 25)

In this example, Roberts uses paraphrase plus explanation to render the role "داية البلد." In Baker's terms, she clarifies the function of the term with the phrase "the village midwife," making the social role immediately intelligible to English readers. The strategy preserves the referential meaning and role designation, but it explains the term rather than preserving its compact, locally embedded form. From Venuti's perspective, this is a clearly domesticating solution: the cultural term is assimilated into a familiar English occupational label, which minimizes the foreignness of the expression.

At the level of diglossia and register, "داية البلد" carries communal authority and a sense of tradition; it refers not simply to a medical role but to a socially embedded figure trusted by the village. The English "village midwife" retains some of this communal sense, yet through its familiarity as a standard term it loses part of the specific oral and relational resonance of the Arabic expression. The critical finding is that while Roberts makes the role clear and narratively coherent, the local authority and social texture of the term are somewhat generalized, smoothing the distinctiveness of village social structures.

Subsection finding: Across these four examples, Roberts consistently preserves kinship relations, gendered roles, and social functions at the level of propositional meaning and pragmatic effect. Baker's strategies of paraphrase, functional equivalent, and cultural substitution allow the translation to communicate who is related to whom, who holds authority, and how domestic roles are evaluated. However, viewed through Venuti's lens and the diglossic/register framework, the examples show a steady tendency toward domestication: local labels and vocatives are reshaped into standard English categories, and the oral, village-specific voice of kinship and gender is often normalized. The result is a translation in which family and gender structures remain visible, but the distinct Palestinian rural idiom through which they are spoken becomes less sharply audible in English.

4.4 Rural material culture

While speech is the primary focus of this study, *The Time of White Horses* also encodes rural Palestinian life through material objects, technologies, and land-related practices. These elements shape the background against which colloquial speech is uttered. Roberts's handling of such material culture shows a consistent tendency to preserve referential meaning while normalizing local specificity into more generic English terms.

إذ يوقدون نار الكوانين قبل أن يدخلوها، أو من طوابينهم ومواقد النار التي يتسلقونها لتسخين المياه، أو من أي فتحة يبرّد عبرها دخان (وجاق) لا تخلو منه كثير من بيوتهم (Nasrallah, p. 43)

"They'd had experience with bread ovens, and with the stoves they would light in front of their doorsteps before bringing them inside their houses. They had also seen smoke rising from the wood stoves they used to heat water in the village, and from the chimneys of the houses of the people who had fireplaces. However, the sight of a fire at such close range gave them the urge to get up next to it." (Roberts, p. 53)

In this example, Roberts uses generalization and paraphrase to render a cluster of culturally specific domestic objects into understandable English. In Baker's terms, she does not attempt to retain each local term as a loanword or calque; instead, she chooses broader categories such as "bread ovens," "stoves," and "chimneys" that capture the functional role of the objects. The strategy ensures that the reader understands the types of technologies and practices involved, but it also smooths over fine-grained distinctions among الكوانين, طوابين, and وجاق. From Venuti's perspective, the passage is clearly domesticating: the local material lexicon of rural Palestine is assimilated into standard English vocabulary, which reduces the strangeness of the scene.

At the level of diglossia and register, the Arabic sentence accumulates references to specific forms of fire use and domestic heating, producing a textured picture of village material life. The objects named are part of a lived environment where speech, habit, and technology intertwine. The English version preserves the general scenario—experience with bread ovens and stoves, smoke from chimneys—but the local technical and cultural resonance of the original terms is reduced. The critical finding is that Roberts successfully conveys the practical meaning of the passage, yet the ethnographic specificity of rural material culture is diluted into generic English domestic imagery.

فرد: أعود بالله، وهل أنا مجنون، ثم إن هذه الأرض أرضي منذ جد جد جد، والكل يعرف هذا. فقالوا له: افرض، لا سمح الله، أن أحداً جاء وقال هذه الأرض هي أرضي، وإذا كنت تقول غير ذلك، فهات الكوشان (Nasrallah, p. 34)

"So he said to his friends, 'Do you think I'm out of my mind? Besides, this land has belonged to me since the time of my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, and his father before him. And everyone knows it!' They said to him, 'But suppose, God forbid, someone came along and said to you, 'This land belongs to me.' And suppose that when you told him otherwise, he said, 'Show me the deed, then!'" (Roberts, p. 42)

Roberts renders the key term الكوشان as "the deed," employing cultural substitution in Baker's sense. She preserves the legal function of the document—a proof of ownership—but replaces the Ottoman-era, locally inflected term with a familiar English legal concept. This maintains semantic equivalence but shifts the cultural reference frame from Ottoman-Palestinian land administration to generic Anglophone property law. From Venuti's perspective, this is a strongly domesticating solution: the foreign legal term is transformed into a target-language category, which helps readers understand the dispute while erasing the historically specific linguistic marker.

Socio-linguistically and historically, الكوشان carries more than just evidentiary meaning; it evokes a whole history of colonial and mandate-era land registration and the precariousness of peasant ownership. The Arabic passage embeds the land dispute in that context, with the repeated "جد جد جد" further anchoring the claim in generational memory. The English preserves the emotional insistence on ancestry, but by translating الكوشان simply as "deed" it risks flattening this specificity into a generic legal scenario. The critical finding is that Roberts maintains the narrative function of the term as a demanded proof of ownership, yet the historical and local legal texture of the land regime is largely normalized, reducing the postcolonial dimension of the dispute for the English reader.

Given that speech is the central focus of the study, these two examples are sufficient to show the trend in material culture: Roberts generally renders rural objects and land-related concepts through broad English equivalents that preserve function but soften local specificity. Baker's strategies here favor generalization and cultural substitution over borrowing, and Venuti's framework confirms a predominantly domesticating orientation. At the diglossic/register level, the richly detailed material vocabulary of village life becomes less distinctive in English, supporting the broader conclusion that while Roberts preserves the world of the novel in outline, the texture of rural material culture is often smoothed along with the dialectal voice that describes it.

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study has shown that Nancy Roberts's translation of dialect and colloquialism in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses* consistently preserves propositional meaning and pragmatic function, but often normalizes the local texture, register, and social nuance of Palestinian rural speech. Using Baker's multi-level equivalence and strategy taxonomy, Venuti's domestication/foreignization framework, and sociolinguistic accounts of Arabic diglossia, the analysis demonstrated that Roberts relies heavily on paraphrase, cultural substitution, and functional equivalents, with occasional borrowing and literal rendering where the source expression can survive in English without severe opacity.

Across hospitality and coffee ritual scenes, praise, blessings, and curses, kinship and gendered roles, and references to rural material culture, the translation frequently achieves strong pragmatic equivalence: readers can understand who is being honored, rebuked, blessed, or cursed, and what social relations are at stake. However, Venuti's lens makes clear that these successes are usually achieved through domesticating strategies that smooth the oral rhythm, idiomatic sharpness, and village-specific voice into fluent English prose. Diglossia and register analysis further confirmed that Colloquial Arabic's layered hierarchy of high/low varieties, and its dense oral ritual, are often flattened into a single, relatively unmarked English register.

Taken together, these findings support the paper's central argument: translating dialect and colloquialism in postcolonial Arabic fiction is not merely a matter of lexical and syntactic choice, but a culturally loaded process that reshapes voice, identity, and literary representation. Roberts's translation keeps *The Time of White Horses* readable and emotionally coherent for Anglophone audiences, but the Palestinian rural voice—its idioms, rhythms, and embedded social codes—is only partially audible in English.

5.1 Implications

The first implication is methodological: the tension between Baker's equivalence model and Venuti's domestication/foreignization axis is not abstract but observable in concrete examples. Many of Roberts's solutions would be judged successful in Baker's terms—especially at the pragmatic level—yet they simultaneously instantiate the domestication that Venuti warns against. This confirms that equivalence-based assessment alone cannot fully account for the cultural and ideological stakes of dialect translation.

The second implication concerns the representation of Palestinian identity and rural memory in English. When household-based insults become generic complaints, when gendered labels such as "ست بيت" are reframed as "first-rate housewife," and when legal terms like الكوشان are rendered as "deed," the social worlds these expressions encode are re-positioned within Anglophone discourses. Identity remains legible, but its specific Palestinian rural script is weakened. This matters for postcolonial literature, where much of the resistance to erasure is carried in precisely these local idioms and registers.

The third implication is that diglossia is central to understanding translation loss. The novel's alternation between Standard Arabic narration and colloquial village dialogue is part of its narrative architecture; flattening this hierarchy into a single English register is itself a form of loss. Even when pragmatic meaning survives, the redistribution of speech into uniform English prose can obscure the social stratification and register shifts that organize character relations and communal ethics in the original.

5.2 Recommendations

For translators working on postcolonial Arabic fiction, the findings suggest several practical recommendations:

Strategic foreignization of key idioms and labels. Rather than defaulting to paraphrase or cultural substitution, translators should consider retaining selected colloquial expressions—especially those that carry high cultural or ideological weight—and using minimal glossing where necessary. Idioms such as "انكسر الشتر" show that some expressions can survive in English with their metaphor intact, preserving local voice without rendering the text opaque.

1. **Differentiated register in English.** To reflect Arabic diglossia, translators can experiment with subtle register variation in English: slightly more formal narration contrasted with more colloquial dialogue, and marked formulations for particularly ritualized speech. This does not require importing non-English dialects, but it does call for avoiding uniform "plain style" when the source text clearly differentiates registers.
2. **Explicit attention to gendered and kinship terms.** Labels like "ست بيت" kinship vocatives, and role descriptions such as "داية البلد" should be treated as analytically important, not as minor details. Where possible, translators should retain or adapt these terms in ways that signal their cultural specificity, perhaps through combined borrowing and explanation, rather than collapsing them into broad target-language categories.

3. **Historical and legal specificity in material culture.** Terms linked to land regimes, property documents, and rural technologies (e.g., الكوشان, الكوانين) merit strategies that preserve their historical anchoring. This could involve borrowing, footnotes, or brief in-text clarification, so that the postcolonial context remains visible alongside narrative clarity.

For future research, the study indicates that similar integrated frameworks—combining equivalence analysis, domestication/foreignization, and sociolinguistic register theory—should be applied to other translated works by Nasrallah and to a broader corpus of postcolonial Arabic novels. Comparative studies across different translators, target languages, and genres could clarify whether the domestication patterns observed here are typical of Arabic–English literary translation or specific to Roberts’s practice. Reader-reception studies would also be valuable, testing how Anglophone audiences perceive foreignized versus domesticated strategies and whether subtle increases in foreignness hinder comprehension or enrich the sense of local voice.

Overall, the recommendations converge on a single point: preserving dialect and colloquialism in translation is not a matter of resisting fluency altogether, but of choosing carefully where to allow foreignness to remain visible. For postcolonial Arabic literature—and for *The Time of White Horses* in particular—these choices directly shape how Palestinian rural life, speech, and identity are heard in English.

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