

## Strategies for Translating Taboo Words and Expressions in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

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### Abstract

*In translation studies, translating taboo words and expressions has become a daunting task for Arab translators working in the translation industry, due to the significant cultural variation. Therefore, the study aims to identify the taboo words and expressions in Season of Migration to the North, by Tayeb Salih, and the strategies Denys Johnson-Davies employed in 1969 to translate them into English. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach; data were collected through documentation of the novel and its English translation. The data were analyzed using Wardhaugh's (1986) theory of taboo words and Davoodi's (2009) taxonomy of translation strategies. Various types of taboo language and expressions were identified throughout the novel, such as sexual, body-related, religious, and social behavior taboos. The findings showed that sexual taboo is the most common type that appeared in the novel, with a frequency of 32 expressions, along with other types like animal references, death, religious taboos, and racism. The findings indicate that the translator mostly uses literal translation to preserve the original text's explicit meanings, while applying euphemism and generalization selectively to reduce cultural sensitivity. The study highlights the difficulties of translating taboo language and stresses the importance of balancing accuracy with cultural acceptability.*

## 1. Introduction

Translation has dramatically shaped the world we live in today, playing a significant role in globalization, cultural diversity, and communication (Lebedeva, 2021; Ghosal, 2026). It helps connect people from different countries and cultures. The diffusion of technology has made the world a smaller place, connecting people globally regardless of language. Language is no

longer a barrier to global communication thanks to translation. In a world of global diversity, translation helps people develop mutual understanding across cultures. Based on that, the notion of translation is not merely changing words from one language to another, but rather it is about helping people from different cultures understand each other. It has been considered as “one of the essential practices that are intimately manifested in the concept of globalization” (Mudawe, 2019, p. 74).

Many scholars have contributed to clarifying the meaning of translation (Asadova, 2024; Barman, 2024). Generally speaking, “Translate” has two meanings: to change speech or writing into another language; to change something from one form into another (Yang, 2009, p. 2136). Some scholars say it is about finding the natural equivalent of a message in another language (Asscher, 2025; Johnson, 2020; Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2023). Others say it is about replacing one text with another. Whatever the various explanations of translation, conveying meaning clearly and properly remains what defines translation.

The translation process is a very complex task and usually requires a thorough understanding and mastery of cognitive, linguistic, cultural, and social aspects. It has already been stated that good translators are not those who master the linguistic aspects of the source and target languages, but those who understand the culture of both. This indicates that mastering culture is vital for accurately and clearly transforming meaning within cultural contexts. Therefore, the translator needs to understand the cultural nuances. This is because words can have different meanings in different cultures. If the translator does not understand the culture, they may make mistakes. These mistakes can lead to misunderstandings or even become offensive. There are various cultural expressions that are considered complex and pose a burden for translators seeking the best equivalence in the target culture, such as idiomatic expressions, swear words, phrasal verbs, and proverbs, to name but a few. Johnson (2020) emphasizes the complexity of cultural differences as follows:

*Other things, like cultural context, are just untranslatable. For example, direct cultural references and jokes are pretty much impossible to translate because the reader would not have the cultural context to be able to understand them. (p. 6)*

Taboo language is language that is considered offensive or unacceptable in a culture. For example, in Sudanese Arabic, there are words that are used as insults related to the practice of circumcision. This practice is unacceptable in many cultures, though in some Sudanese communities it is still practiced. Practically speaking, taboo words and expressions are among the most culturally specific aspects that pose problematic areas for translation based on the fact that “deeply held taboos in one culture can be completely neutral in another culture” (Ulatus, 2024). Therefore, translators must be fully aware of the implications of cultural aspects while rendering meaning.

In translation practices, the sensitivity of taboo words and phrases has made them problematic areas for Arab translators, especially for those who lack a proper understanding of their cultural implications. Therefore, to reveal the myth of these complexities, the study is grounded in *Season of Migration to the North*, a novel by the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih, one of the works of art entirely grounded in Sudanese culture. The novel employs a wide range of taboo words and expressions that are entirely unfamiliar in the Middle East. Accordingly, the study's primary objectives are to identify these taboo expressions and investigate the translation strategies applied by Denys Johnson-Davies, who translated the novel into English. Knowing

about the taboo language used in the novel and the strategies applied to render meaning, the study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. What taboo words and expressions are used in Tayeb Salih's novel? What do they mean in Sudanese culture?
2. How have translators translated these words and expressions into English, and are these translations effective?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Taboo Words

Generally speaking, taboo words and expressions are the type of language that has an offensive impact due to their unfavorable implications in various cultures, especially in Arab culture and the Islamic religion. Taboo words and expressions are “governed by nations’ cultural and societal guides, which are based on agreed-upon expectations and rules” (Hendal, 2021, p. 48). In the same context, Allan and Burrige (2006) state that the word “taboo” derives from the Tongan word *tabu*, meaning “to forbid” or “forbidden”. This can apply to any behavior that is not allowed in a culture. For example, eating meat is taboo for vegetarians, and eating pork is taboo for Muslims. Similarly, Crystal (2003) argues that cultural norms regulate the acceptability of words or their prohibition. These constraints are derived from social custom or emotional aversion, leading to certain actions or words being avoided or forbidden because they are considered unacceptable, improper, or offensive. Jay (1992) suggests that taboos and restrictions are passed down through childcare practices and cultural traditions. Native speakers learn about words and phrases through stories and oral culture, but they also need to understand the psychological and scientific reasons behind these taboos. The media and religion also play a role in shaping our attitudes towards taboo words and phrases. These norms are often based on customs or emotional reactions, and they can vary greatly from one culture to another.

### 2.2 Classification of Taboo Words and Expressions

Taboo words and expressions are deeply rooted in a place's societal, linguistic, and cultural beliefs. Normally, they are used to express both negative senses, represented in tension, anger, anxiety, and disappointment, and positive senses, represented in jokes, surprise, and sarcasm. Therefore, what is considered taboo in one context might not be considered so in another. This led to the notion that taboo words vary widely across cultures, religions, and social norms. The most common classifications include sex, religion, diseases, animals, and bodily excretion. Hammood (2022) has classified taboo words into four categories: (1) adjectives, (2) profanity, (3) vulgarity, and (4) obscenity. In the same context, Mukuni et al. (2016) classify taboo words and expressions into sex, animals, religious, excretion, and social taboos. Likewise, Wardhaugh (1986) categorized taboo words into several categories, including:

1. **Sex:** This category includes words and phrases related to sexual behavior, such as “fuck” and “motherfucker.” Many people use euphemisms like “sleep with” or “make love” to avoid using these words.
2. **Diseases:** This category includes taboos surrounding illness and disability. For example, cancer used to be referred to as “the C” to avoid using the word directly. Mental illness is another area where language has changed over time, with emphasis on person-first terminology.

**3. Death:** Death is a subject avoided in many cultures, and people often refrain from talking about it directly. This is because death can be an uncomfortable topic, and it can evoke strong emotions like grief and anxiety.

**4. Bodily Excretion:** This category includes words and phrases related to waste products or biological processes, such as “shit” or “piss.” Many people use euphemisms like “go to the bathroom” to avoid using these words.

**5. Religious Swearing:** This category includes words and phrases considered blasphemous or sacrilegious, such as invoking the names of God or Jesus. These words can have an emotional impact and are often considered more offensive than other types of profanity.

**6. Mother-in-law:** This category includes words and phrases that are used to describe behavior or perceived sexual availability, such as “whore” or “slut.” These words are often considered offensive and are used to insult or degrade someone.

**7. Animals:** Because they conflate humans and animals, taboo terms about animals are used extremely harshly against people. Animals whose names are commonly used to mock people are thought to exhibit the most repulsive behaviors. When someone curses by using an animal's name, they do so to mock or express rage toward that person. This category includes terms like “dog,” “cock,” “bitch,” “pig,” “chicken,” “donkey,” “fox,” and so forth.

### **2.3 Strategies for Translating Taboo Words**

Within the field of translation studies, various techniques, strategies, and taxonomies provide procedural guides for translators to choose appropriate strategies for successfully rendering meaning from taboo expressions. For example, Davoodi (2009) suggested a framework of translation techniques. This consideration becomes especially important when the original culture and the target culture differ significantly in their ideas about what is sensitive.

**Omission:** This occurs when the translator omits a word from the text. This is done if it is really offensive or not fully accepted in the target culture. According to Mona Baker, this strategy is used when the word lacks an equivalent in the target language. It is also used when the word might not be understood or could cause problems for the audience.

**Substitution:** This is when the translator replaces the taboo word with a less offensive or more neutral term. Even though the new term might not be as offensive, it can still be important to the text's meaning.

**Euphemism:** This is when a translator replaces a taboo word with a less offensive, more acceptable term. This makes the text more polite and softer.

**Footnote:** The translator adds a note to explain a word that might be hard for the audience to understand. This happens when the word is culturally unfamiliar. The original word is still used in the translation.

**Generalization:** This is when the translator replaces the taboo word with a more general or less explicit term in the target language. The translator preserves the original text's meaning while making it less sensitive or offensive.

**Borrowing:** This is when a taboo word is taken directly from the source language into the target language without any translation. This happens when a word is specific to a culture and lacks an equivalent in other cultures. It is also used when the translator wants to preserve the original cultural meaning.

Many studies have looked into strategies for translating taboo words. For instance, Hobbs and Billings (2013) conducted a study on translating words from English into Indonesian in the novel *Beautiful Bastard* by Christina Lauren. The book had 140 taboo words, including terms related to sex, death, bodily functions, and more. The term “mother-in-law” was used the least, while words related to sex were used the most. The study found that all the methods Davoodi (2009) suggested were used in the book, including euphemisms and substituting taboo words with non-taboo words.

Alavi, Karimnia, and Zadeh (2013) found that censorship was the common strategy Persian translators used when translating taboos from English into Persian. Krougloy (2018) found that techniques such as substitution, omission, and grammatical change were used to translate terms in political media discourse. Sometimes translators take a word from the source language and explain its meaning in more detail so that the audience understands the author’s attitude or sentiment. Slamia (2020) identified strategies used in subtitling to translate taboo words, including euphemisms, dysphemisms, and general words, as well as technical strategies such as literal translation and partial rendering.

### 3. Season of Migration to the North

*“Season of Migration to the North is a map to an island laden with treasure; in the mind of the curious ponderer, it is even the treasure itself.”*

— Tayeb Salih

The novel *Season of Migration to the North* was first published in 1966, with a translation appearing in 1969. It has gained interest from both Arab and Western readers and is known for its controversial themes. The novel has sparked significant debate in the Arab world because it challenges traditional cultural and religious norms and openly discusses sexual issues that are rarely addressed in conservative Muslim societies like Sudan. Despite these controversies, the novel is considered one of the most important works of contemporary Arabic literature. In 2001, the Arab Literary Academy in Damascus named it the most significant Arabic novel of the twentieth century. It was banned in some Arab countries, including Sudan and Egypt. According to Britannica (cited in Adams, 2024), the novel reflects clear tensions within modern African societies, particularly the conflicts between tradition and modern education, rural and urban life, and gender roles between men and women. These oppositions highlight the broader cultural and social transformations shaping postcolonial Africa.

#### 3.1 The Author (Tayeb Salih)

Tayeb Salih was born in the northern part of Sudan in July 1929 and died in London in 2009. He earned a science degree from Khartoum University and a degree in Political Science in London. He also studied multiple fields, including media, jurisprudence, and poetry. He was one of the most important Arab novelists of his time and was nicknamed the genius of the Arabic novel (Al Jazeera 2014, cited in Adams, 2024).

Throughout his career, he held many positions, including director of the drama section at the BBC, the Qatari Ministry of Information, and UNESCO Paris, where he served as a regional representative in the Arabian Gulf (Al Jazeera, 2014). A prize is dedicated to his name, the “Tayeb Salih International Prize for Creative Writing,” which was initiated on the first anniversary of his death (Al Jazeera, 2014, cited in Adams, 2024).

#### 3.2 The Translator (Denys Johnson-Davies)

Denys Johnson-Davies (1922–2017), described by Edward Said as “the leading Arabic-English translator of our time,” is a dominant figure in Arabic–English literary translation. He is best known for translating *Season of Migration to the North* into English, thereby contributing significantly to the global recognition of modern Arabic literature. His work shows that translation is not just a linguistic exercise but a culturally rooted practice requiring deep familiarity with the social and historical context of the source language.

Johnson-Davies' cross-cultural competence was shaped by his early life in countries including Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, and England, and later in Egypt, Lebanon, the UAE, and Morocco, enabling him to mediate effectively between Arab and Western literary traditions. Despite his pivotal role in introducing Arabic literature to Western audiences, he encountered professional challenges in England, where his Arabic expertise was sometimes viewed with suspicion, limiting his employment opportunities. Nevertheless, his enduring contributions established him as a pioneering cultural intermediary whose translations significantly advanced the international dissemination and appreciation of Arabic literature (Al-Halool, 2013, cited in Adams, 2024).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Study Design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive method to identify, categorize, and analyze taboo expressions in both the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). The goal is to examine translation choices and their effects. The data in this study are qualitative, aiming to describe and interpret data collected in the form of words, observations, and experiences. According to Nazir (2003), this method is used to investigate the state of an event, an object, a situation, or a group of individuals. It aims to accurately and systematically describe, explain, and understand data.

### 4.2 Data Collection

The data source is the novel *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih. Originally written in Arabic and published in 1966, it was translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davies in 1969. The novel is controversial because it includes taboo words and explicit references to sexual topics that were considered deeply shameful and forbidden in the conservative social context of Sudan in the 1960s (Said, 1994). The researcher read both the Arabic and English versions and underlined all the taboo words. To collect the data, the researcher used the documentation method, which, according to Creswell (2014), involves analyzing public and private records that serve as valuable sources of information about a research site or participants. Three steps were taken in the data collection process. First, the Arabic version was carefully studied, and all offensive terms and phrases were noted. Second, these identified terms were noted in a notebook. Third, the translation techniques used to render these words into English were analyzed by examining the book's English translation.

## 5. Discussion

This part of the study discusses the types of taboo words and expressions identified in *Season of Migration to the North*, along with their English translations, as outlined in the study questions.

***Q#1: What taboo words and expressions are used in Tayeb Salih's novel? What do they mean in Sudanese culture?***

Table 1. Classification and Type of Taboo Words

No	Arabic Expression (Source)	English Translation (Target)	Type of Taboo Word
1	نصرانية غلفاء ابن الكلب	uncircumcised infidel for a wife. 'You son of a bitch'	Religious/Sexual/Animal
2	النساء سافرات يرقصن علانية مع الرجال	The women are unveiled	Sexual/Moral
3	لا يتزوجون يعيش الرجل مع المرأة بالحرام	That they don't marry, but that a man lives with a woman in sin	Body reference
4	رائحة جسمها	The smell of her body	Body part/Sexual
5	فمها على خدي	Her breast touching my chest	Romantic/sexual contact.
6	شهوة جنسية	A vague sexual yearning	Sexual taboo
7	تفحش معهما	I was saying lewd things to them	Sexual / intimacy
8	فيميل كفلها لي اليسار	Her buttocks inclined leftwards	Sexual
9	اقبلها	I kissed her	Physical intimacy/sexual
10	مع كل قبلة	With every kiss	sexual contact
11	جسدها ترتخي	With every touch, with every kiss, I felt a muscle in her body relax	Sexual
12	صحت أن همدت الي جواي في الفراش	Ann Hammond was beside me in the bed	sexual
13	حولتها في فراشي الي عاهره	In my bed, I transformed her into a harlot	Sexual
14	غرفة نومي كانت مثل غرفة عمليات في مستشفى	My bedroom was like an operating theatre	Sexual/Metaphoric
15	فراشي كان قطعة من الجحيم	My bed a patch of hell	Sexual
16	انت كتور هانج لا يمل التراد	You're a savage bull that does not weary of the chase	Sexual/Metaphoric
17	على الجدران مرايا كبيره حتي اذا ضاجعت امراءه بدا كأنني اضاجع حريما كاملا في أن واحد	When I slept with a woman, it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously.	Death
18	مناغاة ود الرئيس مع زوجته	I overheard the love play of Wad Rayyes with his wife	Animals
19	نعم هذه فريستي	Yes, this was my prey	Sexual/intimate
20	النهد يا حاج أحمد كأنه طبنجة والكفل إذا طوقته بذراعيك لا تصل حده.	Her breasts, Hajj Ahmed, stuck out like pistols...	Body part/Sexual
21	ولما قمت عليها سمعت	But when I started on her, I heard a movement	Animals
22	ومن يومها ان تركب وتنزل كأنك فحل حمير	You've been jumping on and off like a jack donkey.	Sexual/Racist
23	هل احد يعرف حلاوة هذا الشيء اكثر منك يا بنت مجزوب	Is there anyone who knows the sweetness of this thing better than you, Bint Majzoub?	Sexual
24	كنت حين يرقد زوجي بين فخذي أصرخ صراخاً	If, when my husband was between my thighs, I didn't let out a scream...	Sexual/Animal
25	كان عنده شيء مثل الوند	If his thing wasn't like a wedge he'd drive right into me...	Sexual

26	وكان حين تأتبه الحالة يشخر كالثور حين يذبحو	When he had his climax, he'd shout like an ox being slaughtered	Sexual/Religious/Animal
27	لو ذقت نساء الحبش والغلاتة	If you'd had a taste of the women of Abyssinia and Nigeria, you'd throw away your string of prayer beads...	Sexual
28	بين فخذي	When I'm between a woman's thighs, I'm more energetic than even this grandson of yours	Sexual
29	بضاعتك مثل عقلة الاصب	What you've got to offer is no bigger than a finger joint.	Sexual/Religious/Animal
30	المدافع سكنت وقت مات ود البشير	You'd have found something like a British cannon. / The cannons were silenced when Wad Basheer died.	Euphemism
31	عقلك كله في رأس ذكرك	Your whole brain is in the head of your penis...	Literal/Taboo for taboo
32	حين ترقد في البرش الاحمر بعد صلاة العشاء وتفتح فخذيها	When she lies down on the red mat after the evening prayer and opens her thighs...	Literal/Taboo for taboo

Throughout the novel, most of the taboo words and expressions found are about sex. A lot of these expressions are said by Bint Majzoub, a character in Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North*. She is a woman who smokes, drinks, and swears like a man. People in her community know her well. They all listen to what she has to say because she is bold and speaks her mind.

This part of the discussion focuses on the expressions Bint Majzoub and other characters use, along with their translations. For example, Bint Majzoub says, "We're afraid you'll come back with an 'uncircumcised' infidel for a wife." Here, the word uncircumcised is an insult because in some cultures, women who are not circumcised are not respected. In this context, uncircumcised refers to the genitalia and the taboos that surround it.

Bint Majzoub also says to Wad Rayyes, "You've been jumping on and off like a jack donkey." This phrase is not an insult, but it is a comparison. The donkey symbolizes someone who cannot make up their mind and is too involved in relationships. The image of jumping off shows that Wad Rayyes has been married and divorced many times. The use of the donkey is about sexual behavior, not just name-calling.

In one part of the novel, Bint Majzoub talks about her experiences with her husband, Wad Basheer. She says, "If when my husband was between my thighs I didn't let out a scream that scared the animals tied up in the barn..." Talking openly about sex as a woman in a group of men is not acceptable in her society. She continues, "May I divorce if his thing wasn't like a wedge he'd drive into me... He'd lift up my legs after the evening prayer, and I'd remain splayed open till the call to dawn prayers."

Here, "his thing" is a way of saying penis, used by the author and translator to avoid being too explicit. The comparison to a wedge suggests that it is big and hard, and the image of having sex for an extended time shows that he has a lot of stamina. Her description of orgasm, "He'd shout like an ox being slaughtered," makes the sexual language in the novel more vivid.

Another time, she teases Wad Rayyes, saying, "You doubtless run after women because what you've got to offer is no bigger than a finger joint." This metaphor is about sexual inadequacy and is a direct taboo expression that shows her honesty and wit.

In another conversation, Wad Rayyes says, “If only you’d married me, Bint Majzoub—you’d have found something like a cannon.” She replies, “The cannons were silenced when Wad Basheer died.” Here, the metaphors are all about sex. The “British cannon” symbolizes power and virility, while Bint Majzoub’s reply implies that her late husband was the best. The translation of these expressions keeps the strength and meaning of the original.

In another interaction, Bint Majzoub tells Wad Rayyes, “You’re a man who talks rubbish. Your whole brain is in the head of your penis, and the head of your penis is as small as your brain.” The translation of “penis” keeps the explicitness of the text, matching the novel’s honest style.

When discussing women, she says, “The infidel women aren’t so knowledgeable about this business as our village girls. They’re uncircumcised. They treat the whole business like having a drink of water. The village girl perfumes herself and lies down on the red mat after evening prayers, making a man feel like Abu Zeid El-Hilali.” This statement compares circumcised and uncircumcised women, showing how people in her culture think about female sexuality. Bint Majzoub implies that uncircumcised women do not have self-control or sensitivity, revealing a cultural bias.

Other characters, like Mustafa Sa’eed and Wad Rayyes, also use taboo expressions. In Mustafa Sa’eed’s relationships with women, the language is just as explicit. For example, he describes his bedroom as having “mirrors so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously.” In another passage, he says, “My bedroom was like an operating theater in a hospital.” These depictions show that the novel uses literal translations of taboo expressions to preserve the original text’s intensity and meaning.

“Wad Rayyes likes uncircumcised women,” said my grandfather. “I swear to you, Hajj Ahmed,” said Wad Rayyes, “that if you’d had a taste of the women of Abyssinia and Nigeria, you’d throw away your string of prayer beads and give up praying.” The word “taste” is used metaphorically for sexual experience. It suggests that intimate encounters with these women are so pleasurable that they could make a man abandon religious practices. The conversation shows the controversial issue of female circumcision in Sudan, reflecting arguments between traditional practices and opposing points of view. This context challenges conventional norms by praising uncircumcised women, undermining cultural expectations, and associating them with greater desirability.

**Q#2: What are the strategies used in translating taboo words and expressions? And how effective are they?**

The translation of taboo expressions, ranging from graphic sexual details to swearing, was a particularly thorny issue for Denys Johnson-Davies in translating *Season of Migration to the North*. The original Arabic text at the time (1969) was considered highly scandalous and was even banned in Sudan for many years. However, the translator employed a set of strategies that enabled him to successfully convey meaning in the target language. The strategies used in rendering the meaning of each taboo word and expression are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2. Strategies for Translating Taboo Words and Expressions**

No	Source (Arabic)	Target (English)	Translation Strategy
1	نصرانية غلفاء ابن الكلب	uncircumcised infidel for a wife. 'You son of a bitch'	Literal

**Strategies for Translating Taboo Words and Expressions in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North**

2	النساء سافرات يرقصن علانية مع الرجال	The women are unveiled	Literal
3	لا يتزوجون يعيش الرجل مع المرأة بالحرام	That they don't marry, but that a man lives with a woman in sin	Literal
4	رائحة جسمها	The smell of her body	Literal
5	فمها على خدي	Her breast touching my chest	Literal
6	شهوة جنسية	A vague sexual yearning	Literal
7	تفحش معهما	I was saying lewd things to them	Literal
8	فيميل كفلها لي اليسار	Her buttocks inclined leftwards	Literal
9	اقبلها	I kissed her	Literal
10	مع كل قبلة جسدها ترتخي	With every touch, with every kiss, I felt a muscle in her body relax	Literal
11	صحت أن همند الي جواي في الفراش	Ann Hammond was beside me in the bed	Literal
12	حولتها في فراشي الي عاهره	In my bed, I transformed her into a harlot	Literal
13	غرفة نومي كانت مثل غرفة عمليات في مستشفى	My bedroom was like an operating theatre	Metaphoric use
14	فراشي كان قطعة من الجحيم	My bed a patch of hell	Literal
15	انت كثور هائج لا يمل التراد	You're a savage bull that does not weary of the chase	Literal
16	على الجدران مرايا كبيره حتي اذا ضاجعت امراءه بدا كأنني اضاجع حريمها كاملا في آن واحد	When I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously.	Literal/Taboo for taboo
17	مناغاة ود الرئيس مع زوجته	I overheard the love play of Wad Rayyes with his wife	Literal/Taboo for taboo
18	مناغاة ود الرئيس مع زوجته	Two white thighs open	Literal/Taboo for taboo
19	نعم هذه فريستي	Yes, this was my prey	Literal/Taboo for taboo
20	النهد يا حاج أحمد كأنه طبنجة والكفل إذا طوقته بذراعيك لا تصل حده .	Her breasts, Hajj Ahmed, stuck out like pistols...	Literal/Taboo for taboo
21	ولما قمت عليها سمعت	But when I started on her, I heard a movement	Euphemism
22	ومن يومها ان تركب وتنزل كأنك فحل حمير	You've been jumping on and off like a jack donkey.	Literal/Taboo for taboo
23	« هل احد يعرف حلاوة هذا الشيء اكثر منك يا بنت مجزوب	Is there anyone who knows the sweetness of this thing better than you, Bint Majzoub?	Euphemism
24	كنت حين يرقد زوجي بين فخدي أصرخ صراخاً	If, when my husband was between my thighs, I didn't let out a scream...	Literal/Taboo for taboo
25	كان عنده شيء مثل الوند حين يدخله في احشائي لا اجد أرضاً تسعني . كان يرفع رجلي بعد صلاة العشاء ، واطل مشبوحة حتى يؤذن	If his thing wasn't like a wedge he'd drive right into me...	Literal/Taboo for taboo
26	وكان حين تأتيه الحالة يشخر كالثور حين يذبحو	When he had his climax, he'd shout like an ox being slaughtered	Literal/Taboo for taboo
27	لو ذقت نساء الحبش والفلاتة كنت رميت مسبحتك . وتركت صلاتك ما بين اخاذهن كانه الصحن المكفى	If you'd had a taste of the women of Abyssinia and Nigeria, you'd throw away your string of prayer beads...	Euphemism

28	بين فحذي المرأة انا انشط من حفيدك هذا	When I'm between a woman's thighs, I'm more energetic than even this grandson of yours	Literal/Taboo for taboo
29	( انت تفلح في الكلام . ولا بد انك تجري وراء النساء لان بضاعتك مثل عقلة الاصب	What you've got to offer is no bigger than a finger joint.	Literal/Taboo for taboo
30	«المدافع سكنت وقت مات ود البشير . انت يا ود الرئيس رجل يخرف ، عقلك كله في رأس ذكرك ، ورأس ذكرك صغير مثل عقلك	You'd have found something like a British cannon. / The cannons were silenced when Wad Basheer died.	Euphemism
31	عقلك كله في رأس ذكرك ، ورأس ذكرك صغير مثل عقلك	Your whole brain is in the head of your penis...	Literal/Taboo for taboo
32	حين ترقد في البرش الاحمر بعد صلاة العشاء وتفتح فخذها	When she lies down on the red mat after the evening prayer and opens her thighs...	Literal/Taboo for taboo

### 5.1 How Effective Were the Strategies Used by Denys Johnson-Davies?

Johnson-Davies' approach was typically a faithful-literary one, balancing the stark, raw text with the aesthetic sensibilities English literature required. The main ways in which Johnson-Davies coped with these taboo expressions were:

**1. Direct Equivalence (Literalism):** Instead of softening the language in the way many of his contemporaries might have for the English reader, Johnson-Davies was remarkably direct. Where the original Arabic text is explicit with terms for sex and anatomy to stress these points on colonial violence, Johnson-Davies uses the direct equivalent in English. The purpose of this direct translation was to allow the reader to experience the shock and rawness of the language, which is essential to portraying the psychological trauma caused by the colonial legacy.

**2. Euphemism and Softening:** Even though he was daring at the time, he occasionally resorts to euphemism and slightly more “literary” English when dealing with swearing or particular slang that cannot be easily translated. For example, some of the very rude Sudanese insults and references to body parts were replaced with more general English slang or medical terms so that the text does not simply turn into obscene babbling and detract from the novel's philosophical point.

**3. Omission and Condensation:** There are instances where, if the text seemed repetitive or a specific taboo idiom was not easily translatable or was too culturally specific in its profanity to convey itself to an English reader, Johnson-Davies chose omission. This was when a specific curse word or religious taboo would be culturally specific in a way that 1960s English readers could not understand, so he would leave the word or phrase out entirely while maintaining the scene's tone.

**4. Domestication of Profanity:** Where possible, Johnson-Davies did not translate the slang directly, as Sudanese insults often lose their meaning completely in an English context. Instead, he would take the insult and use the closest equivalent “socially weighty” swear word in the English language. The effect this had on the reader was that the intent behind the original profanity was conveyed, even though the language itself was not a literal translation.

**5. Footnoting and Paraphrasing:** For religious taboos, such as desecration of prayers, Johnson-Davies often paraphrases to explain their severity, though he very rarely footnotes taboo expressions.

### 5.2 Summary of Strategies Used

Strategy	How the Strategy Is Used	Effect on the Reader
Foreignization	Use of specific loan words/titles.	Maintains the 'Sudanese' character of the text.
Faithfulness	Unmodified direct translation.	Maintains the 'uncompromising' and 'disturbing' nature of the text.
Functional equivalence	Replacement with comparable slang.	Achieves a similar emotional effect.

Johnson-Davies deserves much credit for not “sanitizing” the text; by prioritizing directness over the morality of censorship, he provided an English equivalent of the shock and discomfort Arabic readers felt toward Salih’s novel.

## 6. Conclusion

This study shows how important it is to use appropriate translation strategies when translating Arabic taboo words and expressions into English in the novel *Season of Migration to the North*. The researcher used Wardhaugh’s (1986) theory of taboo words and Davoodi’s (2009) translation strategies to explore this. The novel *Season of Migration to the North* contains 32 taboo words and expressions, most of which are related to sexual terminology, causing problems in the Sudanese community because this is a sensitive topic. When examining the novel, the most common taboo words and expressions are about sexual matters, followed by terms related to animals, and finally, religious references.

The study found that there are two main ways to translate these taboo words and expressions: the first is to use a taboo word in Arabic and translate it into a taboo word in English, which was most often used, and the second is to use a euphemism. The results show that the translator sought to retain the intensity and cultural meaning of the original Arabic text in the English translation.

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