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CRITICAL STUDIES IN
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دراسات نقدية في اللغات والأدب

Critical Studies in Languages and Literature

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Evaluating "Super Goal" English Textbooks: Teachers' Views in Saudi Schools

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Abstract The study examines six ELT textbook series under the name *Super Goal* that are currently used in Saudi Arabia for middle and secondary school levels. Litz's evaluative checklist was used to assess the pedagogical effectiveness of the book series. The evaluation includes multiple aspects of pedagogical assessments, including design and layout, activities, skills, language type, subject, and content, and practical considerations. The sample of the study included 223 teachers who were randomly selected. A 7-Point Likert Scale was utilized for the evaluation. The outcome of the questionnaire revealed positive responses towards the new book series in terms of design and content. Additionally, the study showed that the books were well-received on sensitive topics such as gender and cultural appropriacy, suggesting the reliability and strength of the new book series based on teachers' perspectives.

1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) has been one of the most active research fields, with a constant influx of publications that continuously enrich the available literature with invaluable books, journal articles, conference proceedings, etc. This relentless flow of new ideas is fueled by the eternal quest for perfection in how the English language should be taught. As a result, a diverse plethora of teaching materials has been introduced to

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ELT, including audio-visuals such as audio tracks, video lessons, illustrations, podcasts, newspapers, magazines, TV ads, interactive computer and internet-based materials, in addition to textbooks. The quest for perfection in curriculum development has brought a renewed focus on the most important element of teaching materials, namely, textbooks. According to Gholami et al. (2017, p. 82), textbooks are "the beating heart of any education system, upon which the whole learning revolves". There seems to be a consensus on the centrality of textbooks in ELT. Vitta (2021, p. 1) states that the "primacy of the textbook in English Language Teaching (ELT) is almost beyond question".

Textbooks are central to ELT for a number of reasons. First, they are more comprehensive than other teaching materials and tend to cater to all four skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading, in addition to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural awareness. Textbooks are also more convenient for both teachers and students. They provide a revisitable and reliable source of information for students and save teachers time in lesson planning. They also make the learning process more interesting by providing variety in their content, incorporating such as audio tracks, pictures, photos, and videos. Furthermore, textbooks, unlike authentic materials, are often designed by experts in the field, which makes them more reliable and less risky. It is, however, argued that textbooks do have many disadvantages. Some consider the language contained within them to be a poor representation of the language as it is used in the real world (Gilmore, 2007; Beresova, 2014). Textbooks are not perfect. They have disadvantages, but the heavy dependency on them in teaching English implies that the advantages outweigh their disadvantages.

The fact that textbooks play a major role in ELT has attracted a considerable faction of researchers in this field. Thus, they have been the subject matter of many research studies in an attempt to accentuate not only their points of strength, but also shortcomings that can be treated in later editions and new textbooks. This field of ELT textbook-related research is known as textbook evaluation, which is according to Al Harbi (2017, p. 28), "the theoretical foundation for evaluating and analyzing EFL textbooks started in the early 1970s". This means that this field of ELT research is relatively new and is still flourishing.

To conduct a successful textbook evaluation, researchers choose different tools such as checklists, questionnaires, and textbook analysis. There are, however, numerous factors that should be considered when evaluating a book. Some of these factors are layout/graphics, accessibility, selection/grading, physical characteristics, appropriacy, authenticity, cultural bias, educational validity, etc. (Sheldon, 1988). These should be considered as a mere sample of the elements that researchers use because different researchers employ different criteria depending on their end goal and the context of their study.

Textbook evaluation has gained traction in many countries, especially in Saudi Arabia. This is due to the Kingdom's strive to revamp existing curricula and teaching materials to meet the international standards of educational quality assurance. This drive for change is driven by a number of problems that include, but are not limited to, cultural inappropriateness, irrelevant content, and ineffective methods and approaches used in these ELT textbooks. Consequently, many research papers have emerged evaluating different coursebooks, and the current work is going to enrich the available literature with new findings about unexplored territory.

In this study, the *Super Goal* 1–6 ELT textbooks used at the middle and secondary levels were investigated. These series were selected in view of their significance as the official textbooks currently adopted across all middle and secondary levels in Saudi Arabia. We primarily used Litz's (2005) checklist, supplemented with additional items that measure additional cultural aspects. This quantitative analysis supports the validity of these findings and yields reliable results that can inform the revision and use of ELT textbooks in Saudi Arabia.

2. Literature review

Continual textbook evaluation is a necessary measure for quality assurance in all three tiers of education (primary, middle, and secondary). With constant evaluation, textbook publishers and all stakeholders are not only able to triangulate problems and notice limitations, but also to gain a better understanding of what works well and what does not. Consequently, these books can be revised and taken to a higher level of quality. Textbooks should be evaluated routinely to test their effectiveness in different ELT settings and to make the necessary amendments to keep up with new trends in language teaching and content design. Textbook evaluations are also essential for educational institutions to help them choose the appropriate books that best serve the learning objectives of their programs and curricula. Numerous researchers support the argument that textbook evaluations are necessary for quality assurance in all three tiers of education. Some examples include Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman (2014); Chegeni, Kamali, Noroozi, and Chegeni (2016); Aljouei and Alsuhaibani (2018); Goodarzi, Weisi, and Yousofi (2020); Mohammadi and Abdi (2014), and Tok (2010).

Researchers have used various instruments and approaches to evaluate diverse ELT textbooks. This section reviews the literature previously produced in this regard with a focus on studies conducted in the ELT context. To start, Cunningsworth (1995) compiled a list of parameters that constitute the foundation of any textbook evaluation. These parameters include aims and approaches, design and organization, language content, skills, topic, methodology, teacher's book, and practical considerations. It is worth noting that many evaluators of textbooks have developed or adopted checklists to guide their evaluations. Williams (1983), Sheldon (1988), and Cunningsworth (1995) are among the pioneers of utilizing checklists in textbook evaluations. Many studies have employed checklists created by these scholars and other prominent researchers, often modifying them to suit the nuances of the specific discourse of ELT.

A recent evaluation study conducted by Alharbi (2015) utilized two checklists, Williams' (1983) and Keban et al. (2012), to assess the high school English language coursebook *Flying High for Saudi Arabia*. Alharbi found that each checklist was better suited for different aspects of textbook evaluation, with Williams' providing a more in-depth analysis, and Keban's et al. providing a broader analysis. Alharbi approached 40 high school teachers, 20 of whom completed the checklist. However, the study was limited because only 8 participants had received teacher training, which qualified them to provide reliable judgments, in contrast to the remaining 12 participants who had not received pedagogical training.

Aljouei and Alsuhaibani (2018) conducted a more rigorous and thorough evaluation of a textbook series entitled *Traveller*, which was also limited to teachers. The evaluation aimed to address four major queries: effectiveness in terms of layout, design, and accessibility, effectiveness in terms of activities and skills, appropriateness for Saudi high school students, and factors that could influence teachers' evaluations of the textbook. To answer these questions, the researchers employed a two-fold approach consisting of questionnaires and content analysis. They examined the six books in the series to identify examples that supported the targeted themes. Another strength of this evaluation was the quality of the questionnaire completed by 94 teachers, as opposed to the 20 teachers in Alharbi's evaluation of *Flying High for Saudi Arabia*. The 40-entry questionnaire consisted of two parts: background information about the participants and coursebook evaluation, which was divided into five sections: activities, skills, layout, design, accessibility, and appropriateness. The study paid particular attention to validity and reliability, which contributed to the authenticity of the evaluation. The researchers had colleagues from the curriculum and instruction department assess the validity of the instrument before piloting it with four public school teachers. Additionally, the researchers calculated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients to ensure reliability, which yielded a result of 0.787, an acceptable score of reliability.

Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman (2014) conducted an evaluation of the textbook series *Interactions* using a comprehensive questionnaire with 86 items, which was twice the size of the questionnaire used by Aljouei and Al-Suhaibani (2018). The questionnaire was compartmentalized into sections such as practical considerations, layout and design, aims and objectives, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, assessment, and flexibility. The depth and rigor of this questionnaire constitute a major strength of this evaluation, but the study was limited by the small sample size of 27 ELT male teachers. Additionally, utilizing a single instrument leaves room for misinterpretation and gaps in the collected data.

Checklists are also commonly used in textbook evaluations. Chegeni et al. (2016) administered a checklist adapted from Daoud and Celce-Murcia (1979) to evaluate the textbook *Four Corners*. The evaluation tool was divided into sections covering subject matter, vocabulary and structures, exercises, illustrations, and physical make-up. The checklist was thorough and covered various aspects of the book, making it possible to conduct a detailed analysis. Using a comprehensive checklist, like the one administered by Chegeni et al. (2016), can provide a useful framework for evaluating textbooks in a structured and consistent way, enabling researchers to conduct a detailed analysis of multiple aspects of EFL textbooks.

A more comprehensive evaluation of the variety of instruments employed and the participants involved was conducted by Goodarzi, Weisi, and Yousofi (2021) to evaluate the coursebook series *Prospect* from the perspective of students. In the study, Goodarzi et al. utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. Initially, they employed Litz's questionnaire to elicit the views of 417 high school students on the *Prospect* coursebook. Following the analysis of data collected using Litz's questionnaire, the researchers selectively interviewed nine students to collect further details about their perceptions of the coursebook series. Although this study only involved students, the researchers' findings

indicated numerous shortcomings in the coursebook series. This procedure can be argued to be necessary for the credibility of the findings, as it allows the researchers to extract answers to any lingering questions. Students should be included in any coursebook evaluation as they are the primary beneficiaries of the coursebook. As recipients of information, they arguably possess a different and indispensable perspective that coursebook authors need to consider. Conversely, it could be argued that students lack the experience and pedagogical background to provide reliable judgment.

As previously mentioned, some researchers refer to evaluate textbooks from the teachers' perspectives, while others opt for the students' perspectives. A six-month study that successfully incorporated both perspectives was conducted by Torki and Chalak (2017) to evaluate ELT coursebooks that were designed based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The study not only employed separate questionnaires and structured interviews, but also gathered data from both students and teachers; 100 students and 50 teachers participated in this evaluation.

Litz (2005) conducted one of the more comprehensive and inclusive textbook evaluations of *English Firsthand #2*. His use of structured questionnaires allowed for the collection of diverse perspectives, and the overall organization of the evaluation instrument was both systematic and practical. However, while the study is often cited as a benchmark in ELT textbook evaluation, its applicability to other educational contexts—particularly in regions with different cultural, linguistic, and institutional frameworks—may be somewhat constrained. The socio-educational landscape in which Litz conducted his study differs substantially from that of Saudi Arabia, where educational policies, classroom dynamics, and cultural sensitivities require adapted approaches. Recognizing these contextual differences, the current study builds on Litz's original checklist but extends it by incorporating locally relevant entries that address cultural appropriateness, gender representation, and the even distribution of roles between men and women in visual and textual content. These additions address longstanding concerns in the Saudi ELT context about the portrayal of gender and culture in educational materials (e.g., Sulaimani, 2017; Aljuaythin, 2018). By adapting rather than adopting Litz's framework, our study acknowledges the value of previous tools while ensuring that the evaluation instrument speaks directly to the realities of English language instruction in Saudi public schools. In doing so, we aim to bridge the gap between global textbook evaluation standards and local educational imperatives, offering a model that is both contextually grounded and methodologically sound.

In summary, the reviewed studies offer valuable contributions to the field of ELT textbook evaluation, particularly within the Saudi context. They employed recognized instruments and addressed a range of issues such as layout, skills integration, and cultural appropriateness. However, a closer examination reveals recurring limitations across several of these works, such as small or narrowly defined samples. A number of evaluations also adopted pre-existing checklists without tailoring them to the cultural or educational specifics of the context under study. Although these efforts have helped to advance the conversation around ELT materials, there remains a noticeable gap in adapting established tools to local classroom realities. This study addresses such gaps by drawing on a larger, more demographically diverse teacher

sample and by modifying Litz's (2005) checklist to include contextually relevant items. In doing so, the current research aims to provide a more inclusive and context-sensitive evaluation of ELT textbooks currently in use in Saudi public schools.

3. Methodology

This research endeavored to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the *Super Goal* series of ELT textbooks currently taught in public middle and secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. The *Super Goal* series is a hexalogy, comprising of six books, which are utilized per grade from the seventh grade to the twelfth grade. The objective of this study was to determine the benefits and advantages of implementing these curricula, as well as any limitations and disadvantages that the textbooks may possess. To accomplish this, a thorough checklist survey was conducted to gather data from teachers' evaluations and assessments.

3.1. Participants

The checklist survey was obtained from 223 English teachers who participated and completed the survey voluntarily. All participating teachers are native speakers of Arabic and were recruited online to participate in the survey. 23 teachers were excluded from the study due to their untargeted teaching assignment or incompletion of the survey. Of the 200 remaining participants, 137 are female and 63 are male. The majority of participants (180 participants) are under 35 years old, while the rest are older than 35 years old. The participants are teachers from all regions of Saudi Arabia, including the Central, Western, Eastern, Southern, and Northern Regions.

3.2. Materials and designs

 In order to evaluate the *Super Goal* series, the study employed a quantitative approach that relied on a structured checklist survey to elicit data from participants. It utilized Litz's checklist as the primary component in constructing the checklist survey. However, the research also complemented Litz's checklist by incorporating questions that were asked to examine cultural appropriateness, gender traits, and whether each gender was equally represented in figures, illustrations, and examples.
    The checklist survey was divided into two main sections. The first section gathered background information about the participants, such as age, gender, school region, school name, current grade-level teaching assignment, and the latest and highest received certificate. The second section collected teachers' evaluations of the targeted textbook and was divided into eight sections, which are: practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, additional considerations, and conclusion. The total number of items in this section is 42 checklist questions, with an average of 5 questions per section. To give participants flexibility in their evaluation, the survey employed a 7-Point Likert Scale, which

has seven options from 1 through 7, in which 7 represents strongly agree, and 1 represents strongly disagree. The options of the 7-Point Likert Scale are as follows: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral or does not have a specific opinion, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The selection of Litz's (2005) checklist as the primary instrument was driven by its comprehensive scope and proven reliability in previous textbook evaluations. Compared to earlier tools such as those developed by Sheldon (1988) and Williams (1983), Litz's checklist offers a more structured and practical framework, covering critical dimensions such as layout, skills integration, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical value. Recognizing that instruments developed in other contexts may not fully capture local educational realities, the researchers, as indicated before, expanded the original checklist by adding items specifically designed to assess gender representation and cultural appropriateness, two factors often cited as concerns in Saudi ELT materials (Sulaimani, 2017; Aljuaythin, 2018). This adaptation improves the validity and contextual relevance of the instrument.

3.3. Procedure

The survey was administered by researchers using Google Forms. Google Forms is an online web application utilized to create surveys with various question formats to elicit users' feedback. To ensure comprehension, all items in the checklist and instructions of the survey were written in Standard Arabic, which is the native language of the participants. At the beginning of the survey, participants were presented with general information about the study and a consent form. The consent form included the objective of the study, estimated time to complete, potential benefits of participation, the ability to withdraw at any time without consequences, and the privacy and confidentiality of the collected data. Once the participants assented, they were directed to the first section of the survey, which, as previously stated, includes background information. No identifiable information was collected during the background information section.

The instructions of the checklist survey also included directions for the optimal way to view the questions. For instance, since some participants used smartphones to answer the survey, they were instructed to use their smartphones in landscape mode. This step was implemented to ensure the appearance and clarity of all columns and rows of the multiple-choice grid. All questions of the survey were mandatory, meaning that participants could not skip questions without answering them. However, all checklist questions had a 7-Point Likert Scale, and number 4 indicated either *neutral* or *does not have specific opinion*, which could be utilized by participants to skip items. The participants who did not complete all the questions were not counted in the final results.

4. Results and discussion

Upon conducting an aggregate analysis of the results, it is apparent that the majority of the participating teachers hold positive perceptions of the textbooks under

investigation. It is noteworthy that an overwhelming number of participants either expressed strong agreement or agreement with the statements presented in each question. This can be interpreted as a primary indication that the book series is well-received by teachers and meets their expectations as an effective EFL textbook. This positive reception, beyond indicating surface-level approval, also reflects a deeper alignment between textbook features and the national educational reforms that prioritize communicative competence and cultural sensitivity. According to Cunningsworth (1995), successful textbooks are those that serve both pedagogical goals and the sociocultural context of learners, a criterion that appears to be fulfilled here.

A more detailed examination of the results reveals some noteworthy statistics that merit attention. See Figure 1 below, which illustrates the participants' responses to the item inquiring about the cost of the textbooks.

As the figure indicates, 33% of participants selected the neutral option, which constitutes a surprisingly high proportion compared to the other entries, in which this option is usually represented by a low percentage. A plausible explanation is that these teachers are unaware of the cost of the books, as their schools typically supply their books and accompanying materials. It is also noteworthy that 18.5% of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that the book comes with a teacher's guide, workbook, and audio-tapes, while 42.5% of the 200 participants strongly agreed with this statement, as Figure 2 illustrates below.

For the teachers without access to the necessary supplementary materials, the book cannot be fully utilized, which may reflect negatively on the teachers' view of the books. Therefore, the negative feedback that was received can be partially attributed to teachers not having all the resources they need for optimal use of the book.
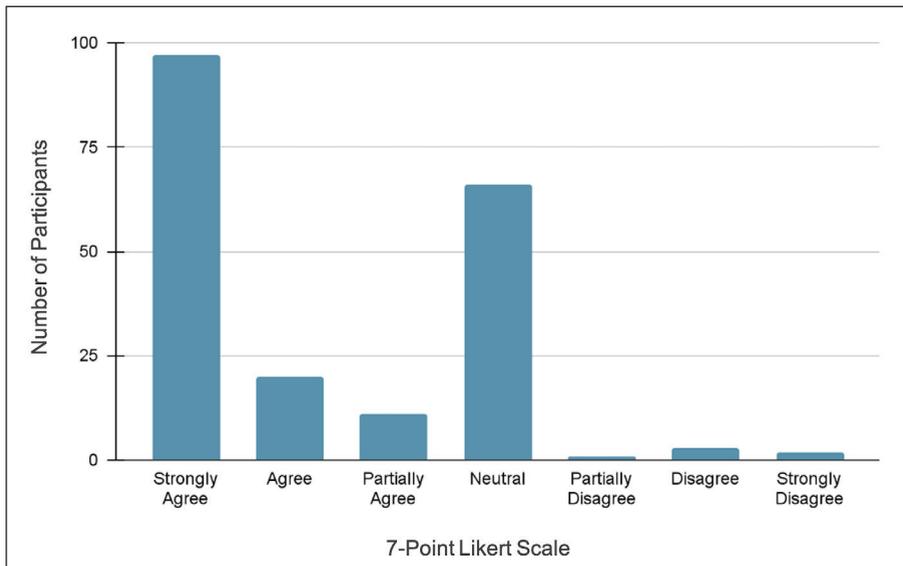
Figure 1. *Response to the entry "The price of the textbook is reasonable".*
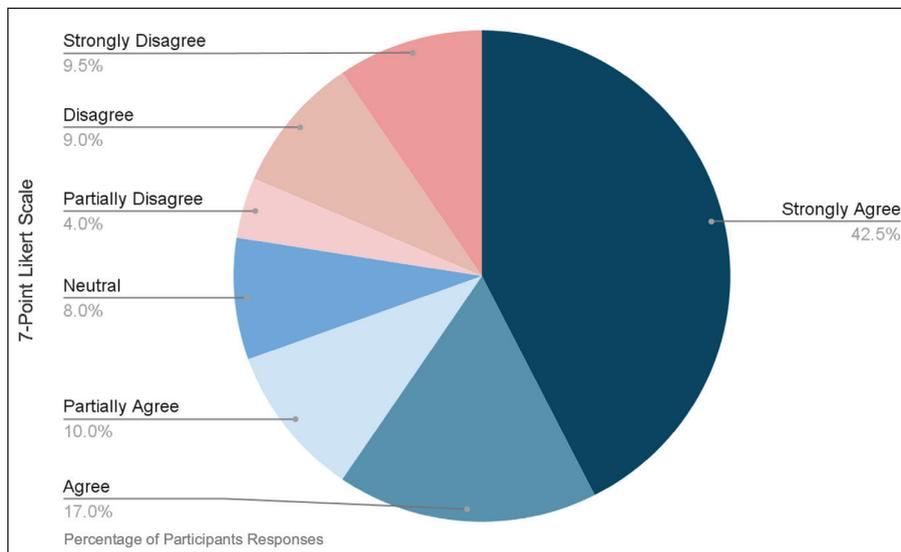
Figure 2. *Response to the entry "A teacher's guide, workbook, and audio-tapes accompany the textbook".*

It is also noteworthy to compare entry 5 between the participants' views on language and methodology and those of the author. The results indicate that 55% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed, while approximately 28.5% did not agree or were neutral. The fact that over one quarter of participants generally disagreed with the author suggests that the book could be approached differently, or at least with a certain degree of modification. However, it would be premature to conclude that the methodology utilized in this book is inadequate, as some participants did not agree with the author. Language teaching is a dynamic field, and there is rarely a consensus on any particular approach, as every faction of teachers and curriculum designers views and approaches things differently. However, this does not imply that they are incorrect, but rather that they adopt a different methodology.

As for the layout and design, the majority of participants were in favor, with the exception of entries 9 and 11, which, respectively, pertain to "An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included" and "An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included". The number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with these two statements was comparatively low, 62.5% and 52.5%, respectively, as compared to the other entries. See Figure 3 below.

This means that a high number of participants think that the glossary and quiz inventory are insufficient and in need of supplementation. Wordlists and quizzes are not, however, an essential part of a coursebook compared to the components such as tasks used to teach vocabulary, structure, language use, and pronunciation,
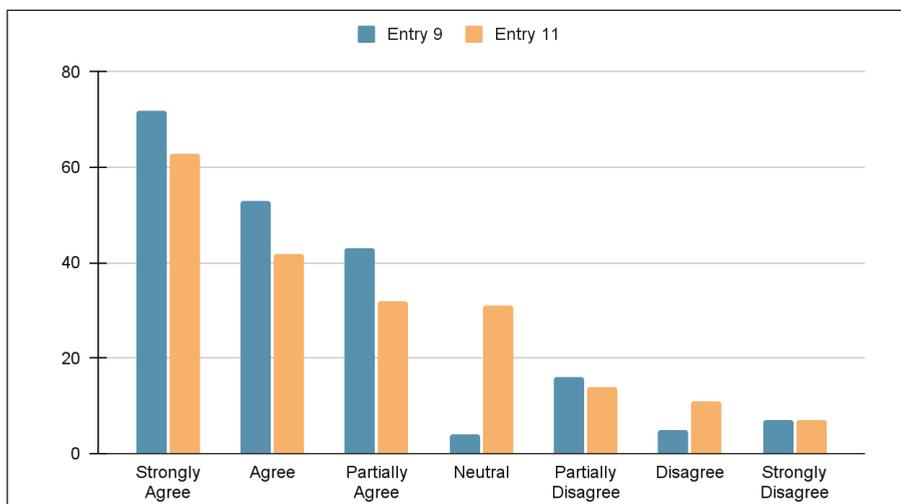
Figure 3. *Responses to the entries "An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included" in blue and "An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included" in orange, respectively, from left to right.*

in addition to reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills. Regarding the activities contained within the book, the average of the seven entries (from Entry 14 through Entry 20) of the activity section in the survey revealed an overwhelming agreement among participants, in which approximately 69% are in favor of the book series. The averages of the participants' choices were either strongly agreed (39.7%) or agreed (28.9%) with all the statements made about the activities, while the disagreement represented a mere less than 10%. This is a clear indication that the activities in this book are generally well-designed and effective.

As for the skills, the level of satisfaction is generally good, but it is overall lower compared to the aforementioned sections. Entry 25, for instance, which addresses the integration of individual skills in practicing other skills, stands out in particular, as the number of participants who were neutral is comparably high, 14% of the participants. This noticeable number of neutral responses could mean that these participants found the question to be vague and could not understand its implication. Therefore, they chose neutral. It is reasonable to suggest that entry 25 does seem to be a bit unclear and exhibits a certain level of circularity.

For language type, the vast majority of participants either agree or strongly agree in favor of the quality of language. However, it seems that the number of participants who are not strongly in favor of the statement in entry 31, "the language represents a diverse range of registers and accents", is considerably high compared to other entries; 7.5% generally disagree, and 9.5% are neutral. This statement may pose challenges for some participants. For some non-native speakers, detecting differences in registers and accents can be elusive. Only teachers with exceptional command of English can spontaneously spot changes in register and accent. The subject of the book and its content are widely hailed amongst the participants. The majority are in favor,

either agreeing or strongly agreeing. One entry that particularly commands attention is entry 36, which addresses cultural bias and negative stereotyping. 83.5% of the participants agree or strongly agree that the materials in the books are not culturally biased and do not nurture any negative stereotypes, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Regarding cultural appropriateness, 75% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the books were culturally appropriate. This outcome is not surprising, given that the book was specifically designed for the Saudi context. It can be reasonably inferred that one of the primary objectives of creating such a book was to ensure its cultural appropriateness for a traditionally conservative society. As for gender representation, 71.5% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that both genders were represented equally and adequately in the book, as demonstrated in Figure 5. This finding is surprising when considered in the context of previous evaluations of coursebooks designed for the Saudi context (Sulaimani 2017). Other coursebooks have been noted to exhibit limited representation of women and dominant depictions of men (see Aljuaythin 2018; Sulaimani 2017). It is possible that the balance in representation in this book series was achieved in response to criticisms in previous evaluations that highlighted the underrepresentation of women in Saudi ELT coursebooks.

Additionally, 65% of the survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that there was an even and fair distribution of jobs and careers between men and women in the books, as illustrated in Figure 5 above. This could also be attributed to the aforementioned book evaluations, which caused a stir and pointed out disturbing statistics about job and career distribution between men and women in Saudi ELT textbooks, as highlighted by Aljuaythin (2018) and Sulaimani (2017). These findings suggest that the Super Goal series responds to prior critiques not only at the surface level but through deliberate design changes. This reflects Sheldon's (1988) argument
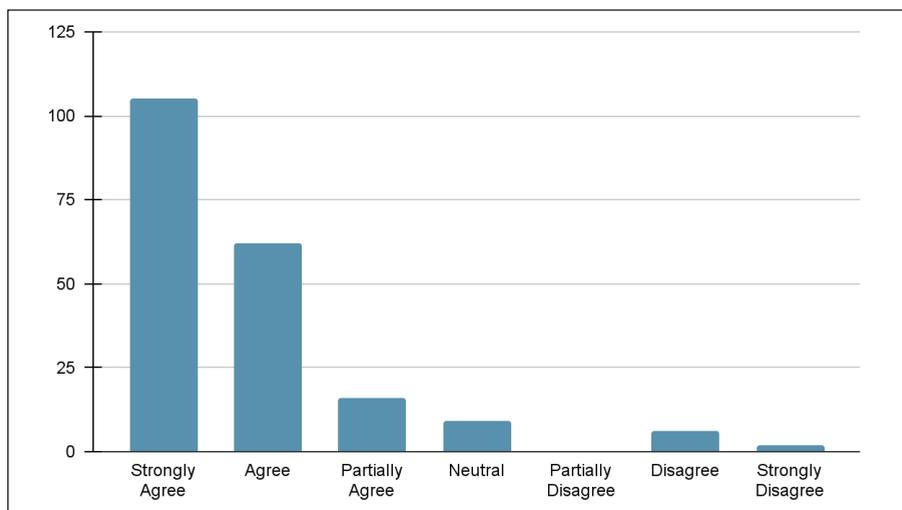
Figure 4. *Response to the entry "The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes".*
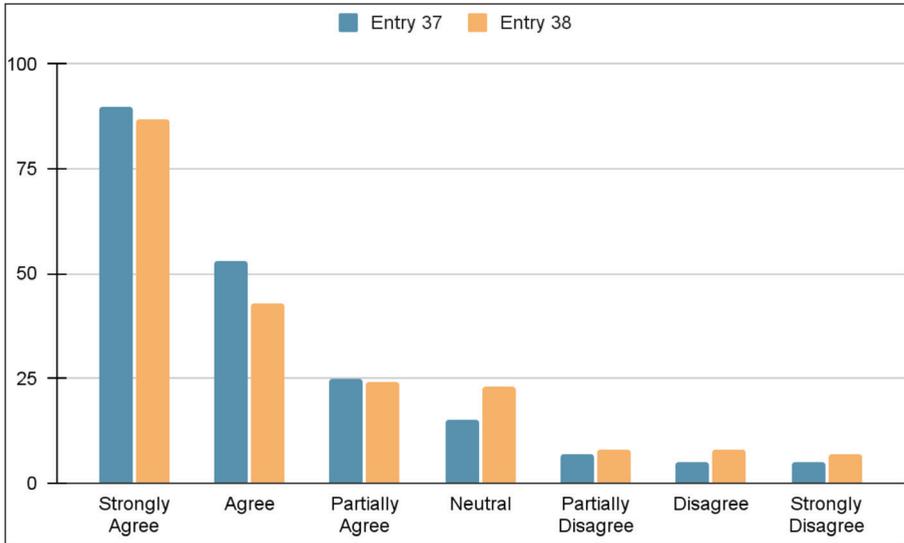
Figure 5. *Responses to the entry 37, "both genders are represented equally and adequately in the book" in blue, and entry 38, "There is an even and fair distribution of jobs and careers amongst men and women in the book" in orange.*

that textbook development is an evolving process influenced by both pedagogical trends and social critique. Thus, the representation balance found in this series can be seen as a tangible product of feedback-driven curriculum reform within the Saudi educational landscape.

Overall, the majority of the participants (88.5%) approved of the appropriateness of the learning objectives of the book series for their institutions. 77.5% of the participants agreed that the book was appropriate for small and mid-size homogeneous and co-ed university classes. 78.5% of the participating teachers agreed that they would choose to teach this book again, and 83.5% found that the books increased their students' interest in further English language study. When this series is viewed through the lens of textbook development theory, these results go beyond simple satisfaction metrics. They illustrate the extent to which textbook features such as integration of skills, cultural alignment, and visual/textual representation. These features now contribute to broader educational aims, including inclusivity and learner engagement. This aligns with Gilmore's (2007) view of textbooks as semiotic instruments that reflect national values and instructional philosophies, not merely tools for delivering content. Thus, this book series can be considered among the best currently in use in Saudi Arabia. The results of the survey show that the majority of participants hold positive views of the *Super Goal* series and approve of their effectiveness, efficiency, and impact as ELT textbooks. However, some areas of improvement were identified, such as the availability of accompanying materials and the integration of individual skills.

5. Conclusion

To conduct this evaluation, the research employed a comprehensive and widely used retrospective questionnaire, namely Litz's questionnaire. What makes this questionnaire stand out is that it covers all aspects of the evaluated textbooks, ranging from design and layout, activities, skills, language type, subject, and content, to practical considerations such as price, durability, and attractiveness. Using this questionnaire revealed that the majority of the participants gave positive evaluations of the textbook series at hand, which indicates a general approval among teachers. It is, however, worth pointing out that the evaluation is limited to teacher participants. Future research could expand this evaluation to include students' views about the book. The students as receivers of the information could have valuable input that can be used to better judge the book series. Additionally, the study is limited by its reliance on quantitative, self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal teaching experiences, institutional expectations, or pressure to respond favorably. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating qualitative methods, such as teacher interviews, classroom observations, or student feedback, to gain deeper insights into how the textbooks are implemented and perceived, as well as to validate and triangulate teacher-reported data.

Finally, beyond descriptive insights, this study reveals that the *Super Goal* series plays a role in supporting policy-level shifts in Saudi ELT. As textbooks are not neutral artifacts but reflect institutional ideologies (Cunningsworth, 1995; Gilmore, 2007), the series' strengths – particularly in cultural aspects – demonstrate how textbook design can mirror evolving national priorities in education. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted not only as feedback on book features but as indicators of systemic reform progress in the Saudi context.

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Subtitling Culture-Specific Items: The Case of Trump's Interview with Al Arabiya

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Abstract This paper explores the subtitling of culture-specific items (CSIs) from English into Arabic, paying special attention to translation strategy and subtitler agency. The study's aim is twofold: first, to identify the translation strategies adopted to translate English CSIs into Arabic, and second, to determine whether there are indications of subtitler agency in this cultural transfer. To this end, the study employs quantitative and primarily qualitative analysis of an interview conducted by an Arabic news TV network with President Trump. The data was in the form of more than 20 instances of CSIs, which were extracted from the 14-minute interview. It was found that the subtitler(s) employed substitution, direct translation, specification, and other strategies. It was also found that the subtitlers leaned towards a target-oriented approach to rendering CSIs, a finding which proved vital to the second aim of the study. It is argued that subtitlers have a form of agency that is apparent in some of their translational choices.

1. Introduction

The translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) from English into Arabic introduces a demanding task because of the substantial cultural disparities between the language pair. Due to the Arabic language's distinctive linguistic and cultural features compared to English, which also has its unique attributes, these languages are considered "distant", which presents fascinating challenges to even the most seasoned translators. These

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distinctions between Arabic and English partly stem from the languages' different histories and linguistic origins. (Raheem et al., 2023); and this might pose challenges in translation, communication, and cultural understanding (Elhadary, 2023). English CSIs, when rendered into Arabic, a cultural system that has few similarities with English, make it hard to translate their function and meaning into the target language (TL) (Hussin & Kamal, 2021). Adding a further layer of distance between English and Arabic is when it is known that "Arabs are mostly Muslims" (Khalil, 2013), presenting some source language (SL) CSIs that often lack direct TL equivalents. These cultural, historical, religious, and social normative discrepancies require the employment of various translation approaches and strategies to successfully convey the cultural nuances and intended meaning to Arabs and Arabic speakers.

When dealing with CSIs, the translator, in our case, the subtitler, must choose between certain subtitling strategies, and this choice sometimes reflects the subtitler's stance on said CSIs. This stance may be deliberately orchestrated, reaching the level of being a form of translator agency or self-expression. In audiovisual translation (AVT) scholarship, self-expression is defined as the use of translation to express oneself through adopting translation strategies and making certain translational choices that portray the translator's self in terms of beliefs and attitudes behind translational choices (Baker, 2016; Pérez-González, 2016). According to Pérez-González (2017, p. 18), agency is linked to the notion of self-expression, and he defines agency as the "increased engagement of ordinary people in mediated self-expression practices". In arguing for the power of subtitling as a political tool, Baker (2016) claims that subtitling " …either undercut[s] the project by failing to reflect or partake of its goals or enhances it by providing an additional space for actualizing these goals prefiguratively".

This study aims to investigate the translation strategies of CSIs from English to Arabic. By analyzing a translated text from a subtitled interview on YouTube, this study seeks to identify the most successful strategy and the challenges translators face in rendering CSIs from English to Arabic. Additionally, the aim is to study subtitlers' possible agency in the translation of CSIs. Ultimately, this study contributes to bettering our knowledge of the complexities of cross-cultural communication and the art of translation within the realm of AVT, particularly subtitling. Specifically, the current study aims to respond to the following research questions:

1. What translation strategies were employed to translate English CSIs into Arabic in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya?

2. Considering CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya, are there indications of the subtitlers' agency in this cultural transfer?

2. Literature review
2.1 CSIs in subtitling

Many studies have studied the translation of CSIs, which are also known as "culture words" (Newmark, 1988), "culturemes" (Nord, 1997), "culture-bound references" (Pedersen, 2005), and "CSIs" (Baker, 2018). The abundance of studies on CSIs

emphasizes the difficulties and varying approaches involved in translating such delicate language. Even the term itself is tricky, as it is not easy to explain what a CSI is. Its complexity is apparent; it is linked to another tricky notion, culture. According to Williams (1976), the word culture is one of the two most complex words in the English language. The complexity of the notion of culture understandably means that not many agree on defining it, as it has more than a hundred definitions proposed by anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), for example. However, it is primitive to at least attempt to present a definition of culture at least within the scope of its use in the current study. Most definitions of culture revolve around the idea that culture includes customs, norms, beliefs, and conventions that shape the conduct of members of a certain group. Within the context of translation, Newmark (1988, p. 94) defined culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". As for CSIs, Pedersen (2011, p. 43), who has produced one of the most elaborate works on the issue of CSIs within the medium of subtitling, defines them as:

> "… reference that is attempted utilizing any cultural linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process. The referent of the said expression may prototypically be assumed to be identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience."

2.2 The Arabic-speaking context

Within the Arabic-speaking setting, several recent studies have studied the translation of CSIs. Abdelaal (2019), Ali (2024), Al Sammarraie et al. (2023), Asiri et al. (2024) with a focus on the application of translation strategies, approaches, and theoretical frameworks, relying on notions such as functional, dynamic equivalence, and CSI classification. Most Arabic-oriented studies rely in their theoretical approach on the works of prominent translation studies scholars, Newmark (1988), Baker (1992), within the subtitling medium, Pedersen (2005), and Hasan Ghazala (2008) for Arabic as a TL.

Newmark (1988) suggested a classification of CSIs, sorting them into ecological, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, and gestures and habits. This categorization assists in identifying the appropriate translation strategy for each type of CSI (Newmark, 1988). Baker (1992) conceded that the lack of equivalences for CSIs causes difficulties for translators, and she proposes some approaches to deal with this at the word level. For instance, Baker suggests cultural substitution in which the translator substitutes a word or expression from the target culture (TC) that can, to some extent, have an impact on the source culture (SC) word (Baker, 1992). The most widespread strategy suggested by Baker is called loan word, whereby the translation of CSIs is accompanied by a one-time-brief explanation so that the reader can understand the CSI's translation without getting preoccupied with multiple and extensive explanations.

As for Pedersen's (2005) seminal work on the taxonomy of CSI subtitling strategies, he investigated the translation problem of CSIs for the subtitling medium, where he proposed a model for subtitling strategies when dealing with CSIs. Pedersen's model includes retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission, or the use of "official equivalent" (2005) (more on these in the Discussion section below). Pedersen also investigated the parameters that may influence a subtitler's choice of strategy and suggested a few parameters, including medium-specific constraints and paratextual considerations.

Although Ghazala (2008) alludes to the equivalent formal-informal translation of collocations in general and not cultural terms, his suggestions may be adopted in a broad sense to CSIs. Ghazala (2008) provides some solutions to the problem of CSIs when translated from English into Arabic. For example, the translator can employ the closest colocation if there is no appropriate TL equivalence. Second, Ghazala tackles translation through the idea of appropriate collocations, that is, two words for two or three for three. He firmly asserts that a direct SL meaning must be translated via a direct TL meaning. Furthermore, an indirect meaning into an indirect one, and not vice versa, Ghazala explained. He makes similar claims regarding preserving the formality of the TL if it is the case for the SL, i.e., formal English is translated into formal Arabic equivalence (Ghazala, 2008).

2.3 Arabic CSIs

Regarding recent research on the translation of CSIs from English to Arabic, several studies seem to agree on the difficulty of transferring English CSIs and the need for adopting strategies that soften this shift from SC to TC. In his investigation and quality assessment of CSIs, Abdelaal (2019) that most of the strategies proposed by Pedersen (2005) were adopted. Abdelaal also reported that other translation approaches were used in the subtitles, implementing formal language to translate informal language and utilizing euphemistic expressions. In their similar study on CSIs, Al Sammarraie et al. (2023) noted that literal translation was the most favored translation strategy used in their data. Ali's (2024) findings showed that the translators employed six translation procedures to transfer CSIs, and these procedures are omission, addition, preservation, globalization, localization, and transformation. As for Asiri et al. (2024), they found that CSIs present both comprehension and production challenges to translators in determining their meanings.

It is therefore apparent that translating CSIs from English to Arabic poses a multilayer challenge due to their nature of being a type of language that requires both intratextual and extratextual knowledge. The translation of CSIs remains a complicated and dynamic activity. The choice of strategy often depends on factors such as the target audience, the text type, and the translator's cultural competence. A thorough grasp of both SC and TC is vital to navigating the intricacies of CSI translation.

The current investigation differs from earlier studies in its employment of an integrated approach that incorporates descriptive translation studies (DTS) (Toury, 1995) approach by textually analyzing the translation of CSIs and the

strategies adopted in transferring them into Arabic, which is the first aim of the study. The source text (ST) is analyzed relying on Pedersen's (2005) model for subtitling CSIs. The study also makes use, wherever appropriate, of Ghazala's (2008) suggestions for dealing with CSIs in translating from English into Arabic. In doing so, the textual analysis takes into account the subtitlers' agency in this cultural transfer, which is the second aim of our study, and one that has not been applied previously to the subtitling of CSIs within the English/Arabic language pair.

3. Methods

The study adopts a DTS (Toury, 1995) using a quantitative and mostly qualitative analysis of an audiovisual text. The first part of the analysis involves identifying CSIs from a YouTube video that involves an interview former US president Trump made with Al Arabiya, a famous Saudi-based Arabic-speaking news channel that broadcasts to all states within the Arab World. In the interview, English is the ST, and it was subtitled into Modern Standard Arabic, the target text (TT). After identifying and categorizing CSIs from this ST, the second part of the analysis requires pairing CSIs with their TT equivalents to examine their translation strategies following Pedersen's model (2005).

The third part of the analysis consists of analyzing the subtitling of CSI, relying on Ghazala's (2008) CSI translation strategies to identify possible cases of translation agency in the form of self-expression or other means of taking a stance based on the translational choices. Díaz-Cintas (2004) criticizes how some studies adopting a descriptive approach to subtitling are too ambitious as they try to analyze bodies of texts that are too massive (2004), and this is why the current study focuses on one text that is highly ample in CSI-subtitling challenges in an attempt to keep the scope as manageable, relevant, and concise as possible.

4. Results

In this section, several examples of translated CSIs are presented and analyzed. The analysis of the CSIs addresses the first research question: *what translation strategies were employed to translate English CSIs into Arabic in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya*. The analysis also helps in answering the second research question: *considering CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya, are there indications of the subtitlers' agency in this cultural transfer*?

4.1 CSIs' subtitling strategies

In identifying the subtitling strategies for CSIs from the ST under investigation, the process started by transcribing the interview into English (ST) and extracting the Arabic subtitles (TT) manually by going through the audiovisual ST frame by frame. Here is a linguistic and statistical breakdown of the ST and the TT.

As seen in Table 1, there were more than 20 cases of CSIs (see Appendix for full list) identified in the research sample. Several translation strategies have been used with these CSIs. The translation of these CSIs has been identified according to Pedersen's (2005) subtitling translation taxonomy (see Table 2 below).

The first part of the analysis reveals that several translation strategies have been used in the translation of the sample's CSIs. These findings answer the first research question, which asks about the translation strategies that were employed to translate CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya. Furthermore, Table 2 illustrates that the strategy of substitution is the most prevalent, being used on half of the sample of CSIs. The second most used translation strategy is direct translation, which was used in about 27% of the sample. The table also shows that specification, omission, and generalization were used on less than 10% of the analyzed CSIs. The analysis also shows that TL-oriented strategies were favored by the subtitlers; more than 60% of the CSIs were translated using TL-oriented strategies.

According to Pedersen (2005), substitution as a translation strategy involves removing the ST CSI and replacing it with something else, and if it is replaced with a TT CSI, then it is a cultural substitution. Pedersen (2005) also notes that substitution could also be a paraphrasing substitution when the ST CSI is paraphrased with something that fits the context. In our sample, four cultural substitution cases and seven paraphrase substitutions were found. The second most used translation strategy in our sample is direct translation. Pedersen (2005) describes this strategy as one that retains the semantic load of the ST, and there is no effort on the part of the translator to convey ST connotations or lead the TT audience by any means. In our sample, direct translation has been mostly used with ST idiomatic expressions, which require a good cultural grasp of the ST and the TT to successfully render them in a way relatable to the TT audience.

Table 1. *Information about the ST and TT*

Video duration	14 minutes and 11 seconds
Video upload date to YouTube	Oct 20, 2024
Word count (English)	Approx. 2,800
Word count (Arabic)	Approx. 2,600
ST CSIs	22
Number of translation strategies used	5

Table 2. *Translation strategies and usage rate in the sample*

	Translation strategy	Number of CSIs from the sample	Percentage	TL or SL-oriented approach
1	Substitution	11	50.0%	TL oriented
2	Direct translation	6	27.2%	SL oriented
3	Specification	2	9.0%	SL oriented
4	Omission	2	9.0%	TL oriented
5	Generalization	1	4.5%	TL oriented

4.2 Subtitlers' agency

One of the most interesting findings to report is the presence of some sort of translation agency in our current data in various forms. One of these forms is the translators' tendency to use translation strategies that, according to Pedersen's (2005) taxonomy, favor TL-oriented rendering of CSIs as illustrated in Figure 1. This is seen as a form of agency because translating cannot be reduced to a static model of culture; rather, it is a dynamic process, and its effects are observable since "the meanings of the translated text are constructed and negotiated by the multiple agents involved" (Kershaw & Saldanha, 2013, p. 143). In AVT research, agency is defined as the use of translation to express oneself through adopting translation strategies and making certain translational choices that represent the translator's self in terms of beliefs and attitudes behind translational choices (Baker, 2016; Pérez-González, 2016).

Looking at our CSI sample and translational choices, another example of translator agency is the choice of not translating certain CSIs due to possibly normative, regulatory, or political reasons. Although it is hard to find out the motivation behind such severe intervention in the translation by omitting certain ST CSIs, it is possible, however, to claim that this counts as a form of translator intervention that altered the resulting TT. This claim is further substantiated when it is known that there is a common feature that is shared by the deleted CSIs; they all refer to certain political figures. For instance, in our data, both times where omission was used as a translation strategy were when Trump was talking about Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, and Al Arabiya subtitlers chose not to translate such comments, even though they were not negative for whatever reason (more on these examples in **Analysis and discussion**).

Other forms of agency were present in the current data in the form of translating ST CSIs by substituting them with politically appropriate TT CSIs. This instance was found on two occasions when Trump was referring to HRH Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman by simply using his first name. Although this is an American way of indicating closeness and friendship, it is not used or acceptable for most Arabs and Arabic speakers.
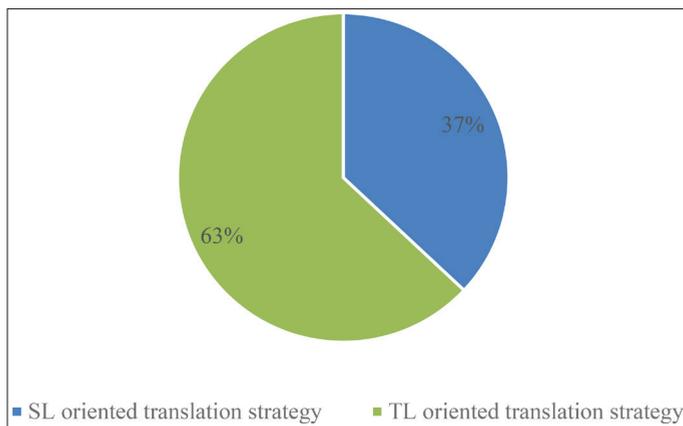
Figure 1. *Translation strategy orientation: SL versus TL*

5. Discussion

The study sets out to respond to two research questions. First, what translation strategies were employed to translate English CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya? Second, in light of CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya, are there indications of the subtitlers' agency in this cultural transfer? As presented in the previous section, a total of five translation strategies were used for the 22 CSIs identified in our sample (see Appendix for the full list). The following sections present these CSIs' examples, analysis, and discussion. The sections are organized according to the most accruing strategy to the least.

5.1 Substitution

As explained earlier, Pedersen (2005) divides substitution into cultural and paraphrasing substitution. Here are examples of both from our data.

Table 3 illustrates an example of an ST CSI that was substituted and paraphrased in the TT, resulting in a more fitting equivalent within the SL context. Although the ST CSI was made to fit the TT, many of the ST CSI connotations were lost as a result of the substitution strategy. Furthermore, the ST refers to an idiomatic expression that is used to convey exaggeration and show the speaker's attempt to amplify the emotions. The TT version, however, is denied from such ST undertones and simply leads the TT audience toward an Arabic equivalent that lacks this extralinguistic feature.

Table 4 depicts another example of a ST CSI being substituted with a TT equivalent that has no relation to the ST cultural connotations. This example and the previous one illustrate a translation strategy that has moved away from the ST CSI in a way that deprives the TT of valuable extralinguistic undertones, especially when the highly political context the ST CSI was used is considered.

Table 5 is a case of substituting the ST CSI with a TT that fits the general meaning of the phrase but lacks in other ways. The ST CSI here is an idiomatic expression that has its uses and indications, and the translation strategy used for such a CSI has caused a notable loss of meaning. As is the case with almost any literary translation, there must be some sort of loss as a natural result of the cultural transfer process, but in our example, this loss could have been minimized. One possible solution could be

Table 3. *Example: substitution (paraphrasing)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Chock-full	شاملة	Comprehensive	Trump discusses how the Abraham Accords would have been Chuck full of Arab States within a year.

Table 4. *Example: substitution (paraphrasing)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Stiffs	لا شيء على الإطلاق	Nothing at all	Trump refers to President Biden and Vice President Harris.

the use of a TT CSI that incorporates the ST CSI's connotations without allowing the TT audience to be left out on some aspects of the ST.

Looking at Tables 3–5 collectively, the adopted translation strategies could have been better had the strategy been different. Although the language pair, English and Arabic, is presumed distinct in its linguistic and associated cultures, there are translational choices that might have helped the transfer of the CSIs from these examples. As suggested by Ghazala (2008), there are various ways to solve the problematic nature of CSIs when translated from English into Arabic by using the nearest collocation in case of a lack of suitable Arabic equivalence. After further analyzing Tables 3–5, it is notable that ST CSIs could have been translated to an Arabic equivalent that better preserves the ST CSI's meaning instead of simply substituting and paraphrasing it. A similar translational choice could have been made about preserving the formality of the SL in the TL, i.e., formal English is translated into a formal Arabic equivalent (Ghazala, 2008).

Table 6 demonstrates an example of an ST CSI that was substituted with a more fitting TT CSI. This translation strategy is justified given the context and the intended audience of the TT. Most Arab State leaders are seldom referred to by the media using their first name, and the translators at Al Arabiya reasonably followed the norm in this instance. Following the norm and altering the ST, even in a slight way, constitutes an example of agency by the translators as they intervene in the TT. As discussed earlier, this is an illustration of agency as the translator(s) express themselves by adopting a translation strategy and making translational choices that represent the translator's self in terms of beliefs and attitudes (Baker, 2016; Pérez-González, 2016), and this is what is happening here in Table 6.

Table 7 depicts an example of a cultural substitution where the ST CSI is replaced with an appropriate TT CSI. Specifically, the ST expression "God rest their souls" is replaced by an Arabic equivalent that serves a similar function to the ST. Here, the translational choice serves to maintain the meaning of the ST in a way that is somewhat relatable to the TT audience. Choosing a TL-oriented approach, in this case, is understandable; however, it does not transfer the ST CSI to the TT adequately. A more culturally appropriate translation would be "رحمهم الله" or "طيب الله ثراهم" which means may Allah have mercy on their souls. This example is also another form of translator agency as it represents a form of the translator's depiction of their own beliefs in their translational choices and strategies, as is the case with the previous example.

Table 5. *Example: substitution (paraphrasing)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Bowl of cherries	ممتلئة بالبهجة	Filled with joy	Trump describes how life was for the people before they were taken hostage.

Table 6. *Example: substitution (cultural)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
So much respect for Mohammad	الكثير من الاحترام لولي العهد	Lots of respect to the crown prince	Trump talks about Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

5.2 Direct translation

For Pedersen (2005), the direct translation is a strategy where the semantic load of the ST CSI is untouched, i.e., nothing is added or taken away. The following are examples of such a strategy used to render CSIs from the current sample.

Table 8 illustrates an example of direct translation according to Pedersen's (2005) translation strategies. As explained earlier, this strategy retains the semantic weight of the ST CSI and is therefore one of the translation strategies in our sample that is SL-oriented. Table 8 is an explicit example of a translation that does not cater to guiding the TT audience in any way. Looking at Table 8 thoroughly, it is notable that the translator did not try using a TT equivalent that better transfers the ST's idiomatic sense. Because the ST CSI is an expression, it might have been better to be translated into an Arabic equivalent that serves the same function, an idiomatic expression.

Again, here Ghazala's CSI solutions might have been of help in this particular situation. According to Pedersen (2005), direct translation as a strategy is often used for translating names of companies, official institutions, and technical gadgets, and in Table 8, the CSI is none of that. The ST CSI could have been translated in a way that preserves the ST's idiomatic nature, as mentioned earlier. In fact, the choice of strategy, that is, direct translation, is less successful compared to more fitting ones, such as cultural substitution.

Table 9 is another example of direct translation as a translation strategy. In this example, Trump discusses how Biden's government, Trump's rival, has allowed Iran to come "back into the game" after being isolated and sanctioned during Trump's term as president from 2017 to 2021. What makes this ST CSI tricky to translate is its reliance on the TT's background knowledge of seeing the political world as a game, a view that is not particularly shared with Arabs and Arabic speakers. Using direct translation for such an expression is therefore problematic, as it conveys an ST CSI by translating it directly without guiding the TT audience in any way.

Table 10 is another example of an ST CSI that almost has no equivalent in Arabic. Here, the translator chose to use direct translation as a strategy, and the resulting TT does not make sense in the TL. The aspect of capital and small letters simply does not exist in Arabic, and using a direct translation to render this ST CSI deprives the TT audience of an important aspect of the ST. Other translation strategies might have had better results with this example and could have improved this cultural transfer greatly.

Table 7. *Example: substitution (cultural)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
God rest their souls	طيب الله أرواحهم	May Allah sweeten their souls	Trump mentions the death of young people in Palestine.

Table 8. *Example: direct translation*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Paper tiger	نمر من ورق	Tiger of paper	Trump explains Putin's view of the US.

As explained earlier, Baker (1992) admitted that the lack of equivalences for CSIs requires some approaches to deal with this at the word level, as is the case with the examples from Tables 8–10. Baker proposes cultural substitution, and this can be applied to the aforementioned examples, yielding a smoother CSI transition. Another solution, also proposed by Baker, is the use of a loanword whereby the translation is supplemented by a one-time brief description with the aim of not getting the reader preoccupied with multiple and extensive explanations.

5.3 Specification

Specification as a translation strategy, as stated by Pedersen (2005), means leaving the CSI in its untranslated form but adding information that is not present in the ST, making the TT more specific. According to Pedersen (2005), specification is achieved either by exploitation or addition. Explicitation is defined as a shift in translation from what is implicit in the ST to what is explicit in the TT (Murtisari, 2016).

In Table 11, the translation strategy is a specification with an addition. The addition is the Arabic word "يسلّم" (to greet/ to shake hands), which was added to adjust for the lack of an Arabic equivalent for the ST CSI. The resulting TT seems vague and unnatural in Arabic because of the literal translation of the expression "fist pump" into the Arabic "قبضة اليد" (hand fist). The problem here lies in the idea that "fist pumping" simply has no equivalent in Arabic linguistically or physically. Although there was an attempt by the translator to mediate this cultural discrepancy by using addition, the TT still lacks clarity.

Unlike the addition in the previous example from Tables 11 to 12 illustrates an example where specification by addition has made more sense. In this example, Trump casually mentions the name Victor Orban without stating that he is the Prime Minister of Hungary. Al Arabiya's translator(s) conformed with the Arabic norm by adding the head of state's official title and chose a translation strategy that facilitated this cultural shift from English to Arabic.

Table 9. *Example: direct translation*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Back into the game	العودة إلى اللعبة	Going back into the game	Trump discusses Iran's political situation.

Table 10. *Example: direct translation*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Great with capital letters	عظيمة .. بحروف كبيرة	Great with big letters	Trump discusses the US.

Table 11. *Example: specification (addition)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Fist pumps	ويسلم بقبضة يده	Shook hands with his fist	Trump talks about how Biden should not have been cold when meeting Middle Eastern leaders.

5.4 Omission

Pedersen (2005) describes omission as a valid translation strategy that simply means replacing the ST CSI with nothing. He further explains that omission may be the only possible option in some cases, and it may also be the result of laziness on the part of the translator. Here are a few examples of omissions used when translating CSIs from our current sample.

Pedersen (2005) describes omission as a valid translation strategy that simply means replacing the ST CSI with nothing. He further explains that omission may be the only possible option in some cases, and it may also be the result of laziness on the part of the translator.

Table 13 demonstrates two examples of the same translation strategy, omission, and they have been combined because the examples and the contexts are very similar. Although omission is a very legitimate translation strategy (Toury, 1995), it reflects strongly on the subtitler's agency in this case. As discussed earlier in the section Subtitlers' agency above, a subtitler agency takes many forms, and in the current sample, Pedersen (2005) describes omission as a valid translation strategy that simply means replacing the ST CSI with nothing. He further explains that omission may be the only possible option in some cases, and it may also be the result of laziness on the part of the translator.

Table 13 illustrates one of these forms. As far as translation strategies are concerned, omission is seen as one of the most extreme TL-oriented ones because there is no more extreme strategy than not subtitling at all. As a translation strategy, omission is often chosen when all other translation strategies fail, but in these examples, it seems that there is a deliberate motive behind the omission. Unfortunately, there is no definitive way of knowing the motives behind Al Arabiya's subtitling strategies, yet some patterns do suggest some trends, especially with political content.

Examples of omission from Table 13 share the fact that both relate to an absent person. Specifically, Trump in both cases was referring to someone as "my friend" and "your friend". By way of inference, Trump is referring to HRH Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, and the subtitlers for some reason chose not to convey this ST CSI or the information behind it. In making such a decision, Al Arabiya's

Table 12. *Example: specification (addition)*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Victor Orban	رئيس وزراء المجر	Prime Minister of Hungary	Trump mentions the Prime Minister of Hungary.

Table 13. *Example: omission*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Including your friend and my friend	None	-	Trump refers to HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.
And say hello to my friend	None	-	

subtitlers are making a stance by intervening in the translation process either because they are following an internal/external protocol or because they have personal reasons.

5.5 Generalization

Generalization as a translation strategy involves replacing the ST CSI that refers to something specific with something more general (Pedersen, 2005), and not necessarily a CSI. Here is an example of this strategy from the sample:

   Table 14 depicts a generalization in the form of changing the narrow range of the ST CSI from "hitting back", which involves aggression and mostly military retaliation, to the more general Arabic equivalent "الرد", which is a broad term that simply means: to reply, to respond, and so on. The ST CSI here involves a more precise sense and mainly alludes to a military response, whereas the TT does not.

   In conclusion, the interplay between agency and translation strategies is particularly evident in the way subtitlers select and apply various approaches to render CSIs. For instance, the use of generalization and substitution, as seen in the translation of "hitting back" to "الرد," reflects conscious decisions that go beyond linguistic equivalence and demonstrate the subtitler's active role in shaping the TT. These examples illustrate that subtitlers exercise agency by choosing strategies that align with broader communicative and cultural objectives, rather than merely following prescriptive norms. Such agency is supported by Pedersen's framework, which acknowledges the translator's discretion in navigating CSI challenges (Pedersen, 2011) (Pedersen, 2011), and is further corroborated by studies that highlight the impact of individual choices on the translation outcome (Abdelaal,

Table 14. *Example: generalization*

ST CSI	Arabic subtitles	Backtranslation	Context
Hitting back	الرد	response	Trump discusses Israel's right to defend itself.
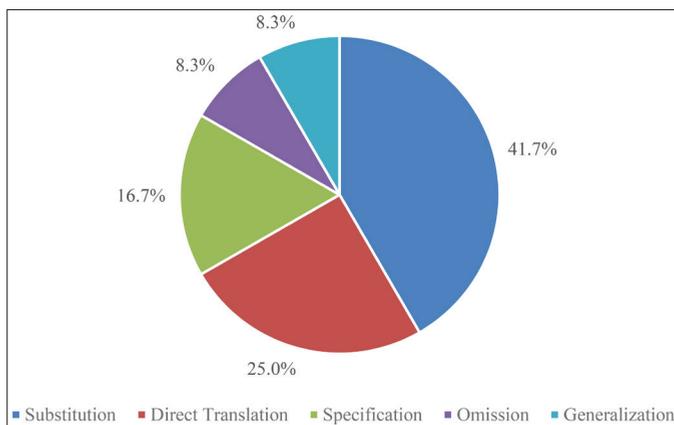
Figure 2. *Translation strategy distribution*

2019; Ali, 2024; Dwyer, 2012). This reinforces the notion that translation strategies are not only technical solutions but also expressions of subtitler agency, especially when handling culturally sensitive or politically charged content.

The analysis of the study's findings shows that our study has similarities to those studies focusing on the English CSI to Arabic as a translation direction. In one way, our findings are consistent with those of other studies in that most of the strategies proposed by Pedersen were adopted (Abdelaal, 2019; Ali, 2024). However, our results are inconsistent with studies that found that literal translation was the most favored translation strategy used in their data. (Al Sammarraie et al., 2023). Interestingly, the current study's findings also indicate that translating CSIs into Arabic presents multilayer challenges (Figure 2) to the translators, a finding that was reported by previous research (Asiri et al., 2024). Finally, the most intriguing finding is the presence of forms of translator/subtitler agency, which, to our knowledge common among fansubs (Abdolmaleki et al., 2018; Aljammaz, 2023; Wongseree, 2016) and not mainstream translators/subtitlers working for a mainstream TV network such as Al Arabiya.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to answer two research questions: what translation strategies were employed to translate CSIs in Trump's interview with Al Arabiya, and whether there are indications of the subtitlers' agency in this cultural transfer. In answering the first question, the analysis demonstrates that substitution, direct translation, specification, omission, and generalization were used to transfer various ST CSIs from the study's sample. It was found that substitution is the most widespread, being used more than 40%, while direct translation was used about 25%, and other strategies were used on less than 20% of the analyzed CSIs. Interestingly, the analysis also shows that TL-oriented strategies were favored by the subtitlers, which led to answering the second research question.

As for the second research question, the analysis revealed that there are forms of agency demonstrated in the choice of translation strategies or translational choices at the word level. Looking at the examples collectively, it is obvious that Al Arabiya's subtitlers, or other stakeholders, do influence translational decisions by intervening in the rendering of CSIs, especially politically leaning ones. It is hard to know to what degree the subtitlers have freedom on such choices, which is an area that warrants research attention, but it is at least evident that the resulting TT has been intentionally shaped in a certain way. This indication of subtitler agency could be a form of self-representation made possible by embracing a different view of agency as an empowering capacity of translation as a mode of "personal expression" (Dwyer, 2012), which was evident in our findings.

This study has some limitations, one of which is that it focuses on the transfer of English CSIs into Arabic, which limits its scope to this language pair. Another limitation is the lack of input from Al Arabiya's subtitlers and other stakeholders in the translation process. Their input could have contributed valuably to inquiries about the translation process, the procedures involved, and the reasoning behind adopting one translation strategy over another.

Even with these limitations, our findings contribute to the broader knowledge of translation theory and cultural transferability, particularly in the context of subtitling. They also offer insights into the challenges encountered and strategies employed by subtitlers working with culturally different audiovisual texts. The outcomes of this study might have implications for the development of more effective subtitling strategies for CSIs, and ultimately better understanding of the role of subtitlers as agents of change. The study's methodology could be modified to be used on large-scale inquiries of similar aims or on different AVT mediums such as dubbing, live subtitling, or even Audio description, which is a research endeavor that has the potential to further expand CSI research and AVT in general.

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APPENDIX

	ST CSI	TT CSI	Strategy	SL or TL orientation
1	Swing states	الولايات المتأرجحة	Direct translation	SL-oriented
2	Including your friend and my friend	No translation	Omission	TL-oriented
3	Taliban	طالبان	Direct translation	SL-oriented
4	Afghan	أفغانستان	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
5	Paper tiger	نمر من ورق	Direct translation	SL-oriented
6	Great with capital letters	عظيمة .. بحروف كبيرة	Direct translation	SL-oriented
7	So much respect for Mohammad	الكثير من الاحترام لولي العهد	Substitution (cultural)	TL-oriented
8	We still have to win a race	ولكن لا يزال علينا الفوز بالسباق	Direct translation	SL-oriented
9	Fist pumps	ويسلم بقبضة يده	Specification (addition)	SL-oriented
10	Chock-full	شاملة	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
11	Foolish	خيالياً	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
12	Back into the game	العودة إلى اللعبة	Direct translation	SL-oriented
13	God Rest their souls	طيب الله أرواحهم	Substitution (cultural)	TL-oriented
14	Bowl of cherries	ممتلئة بالبهجة	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
15	Hitting back	الرد	Generalization	TL-oriented
16	Victor Orban	رئيس وزراء المجر	Specification (addition)	SL-oriented
17	ISIS	داعش	Substitution (cultural)	TL-oriented
18	Knocked it out	قضينا عليه	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
19	He's not into that	إنه لا يؤيد ذلك	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
20	I'll work with Mohammad	سأعمل مع ولي العهد	Substitution (cultural)	TL-oriented
21	Stiffs	لا شيء على الإطلاق	Substitution (paraphrase)	TL-oriented
22	And say hello to my friend	No translation	Omission	TL-oriented

The Challenges of ESP Teaching: The Case of Majmaah University

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Abstract Studies on ESP challenges at Majmaah University are limited. This study sets out to probe the challenges faced by ESP instructors at Majmaah University. For that end, ESP instructors' perspectives about the challenges and the solutions they put forward to overcome them were navigated (around 250 messages from 63 participants). Carefully moderated online focus group discussions were first used to collect the relevant data, and then thematization and categorization methods were employed to analyse them. The findings revealed six major challenges: *1. Challenges dealing with instructors; 2. Challenges dealing with students; 3. Challenges dealing with teaching materials and teaching strategies; 4. Challenges dealing with evaluation; 5. More specific challenges; 6. Challenges dealing with the relationship between language instructors and subject-matter instructors*. Specific solutions were suggested to overcome each set of these challenges. Numerous implications were likewise discerned and discussed in the light of the findings: pedagogical, policy-making, and future research implications. These include: considering students' needs analysis in course design, updating or selecting more appropriate coursebooks, using supplementary materials, incorporating instructor self-training, arranging more effective collaboration between language and subject-specialty instructors/scholars, alongside researching more specific challenges when combining the focus groups with other qualitative methods.

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1. Introduction

English for specific purpose (ESP) can be defined as a dynamic approach to English language teaching and learning that takes into account, not only the learners' specific needs, (academic, professional, vocational, communicational, and so on), but also the growing awareness of the complexity of the learning process, the swiftly changing roles of today's educational, linguistic, professional and technological world.

More recently, there has been an increase in the already growing awareness of the importance of ESPs in higher education in many parts of the world, including Saudi Arabia. This shift reflects the need to tailor language instruction to cater to the requirements of students across academic and professional fields (Fitria, 2020; Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Muminova, 2025). Teaching ESP poses serious challenges for educators at Majmaah University, where proficiency in English is almost crucial for success and career growth, given that many science, engineering, and medical departments use English as a medium of instruction.

Teaching ESP is, in many ways, challenging as it covers fields like medicine and engineering, each with its specific language requirements and communication contexts. Instructors of ESP face challenges in providing appropriate instruction catering to the communication needs of their students due to factors such as a lack of adequate resources, diverse student demographics, and changing academic and professional requirements (Alsharif & Shukri, 2018; Bracaj, 2014; Zhang, 2017).

Understanding the difficulties encountering ESP instructors at Majmaah University is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of language teaching and boosting students' learning achievements. This research aims to shed light on these challenges and propose strategies that can be implemented to tackle them, thus contributing to the field of ESP pedagogy.

This study takes a qualitative design approach where researchers engage in focus group discussions with ESP instructors at Majmaah University, where ESP is taught for diverse academic purposes, to gather data about their difficulties and strategies when teaching ESP. Our goal is to analyze these findings and shed light on the complexities of ESP instruction, offering recommendations for curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional support.

In summary, this research paper addresses a gap in the existing literature by understanding the challenges and strategies specific to Majmaah University. By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, educators can create a supportive learning environment that enables students to excel academically and professionally.

2. Theoretical Framework

ESP has been a major theoretical and practical development in English Language Teaching as a result of certain educational and global factors and developments. Over the years, and since the 1970s and 1980s, many approaches have emerged: The language-based, the register-based, discourse-based, learner-based, and learning-based approaches (Fritria, 2020; Hans & Hans, 2015; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987;

Widdowson, 1990). Notably, Hutchinson and Waters' approach (1987) to ESP is primarily based on the concept of needs and the complexity of the learning process, i.e., the learning-centred approach. Within this development, many specialized journals and international academic conferences have been devoted to ESP. Challenges and difficulties of ESP can be probed from various perspectives. They can be viewed from the instructor's and/or the learner's standpoints. They can also be investigated, considering issues like course design and materials development. In addition, demographic and environmental, and ecological factors have been cited in the literature. In this regard, Fitria (2020) maintains that:

The goal of ESP is oriented and focused on English teaching and learning, designed for the specific learners according to learners' academic and professional needs. ESP course is developed based on an assessment of purposes and needs and the activities for which English is needed. However, in ESP, it is a needs analysis that determines which language skills are most needed by the learners, and the syllabus is designed accordingly (pp. 64–65).

In fact, needs analysis has been so central to ESP as to almost be the most defining feature of it. This is due to a multitude of reasons as it helps: 1) making the goals more objective, concrete, and measurable, 2) identifying the more specific linguistic, communicational, discoursal, and pragmatic needs of any particular ESP learners, 3) relating the students' identifiable needs with the target professional and academic situation, 4) making ESP courses much more effective, efficient, practical and real-life customized.

Bhata et al. (2011) discuss visions and challenges of ESP in the 21st century, calling for bridging the gap between ESP classrooms and the professional world, via the integration of "discursive competence, disciplinary knowledge and professional practice in a complex and dynamic manipulation of socio-pragmatic space within which most forms of specialized communication take place" (p. 14). What is more, the latter writers envisage the relevance of two important concepts "systemic literacy" (the acquisition of knowledge in which language is central in connecting and transferring literacy skills and competences across languages) and "ESP bilingualism" (the fact that background experience in first language supports the learning of ESP in another language) urging, insightfully, for a shift from the tradition of native-speaker model to the English as a Lingua franca (hereafter ELF) model which incorporates the notion of multi-competence and interdiscursive competence (Cook, 1991, 2010, 2013). Insightful, as this integration of discourse competence, disciplinary knowledge (knowledge of the specialty/technical domain) along with ELF, is, it still remains to be seen how it works in reality and how it can be applied effectively.

In general, the literature in ESP is so huge and diverse, and there is a whole host of relevant studies. However, the following is a selection of research papers that are thought to benefit and guide this study in many important ways.

3. Review of Related Literature

Poedjiastutie (2017) examines the difficulties encountered by the (ESP) curriculum at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM), Indonesia. In line with their

dedication to enhancement, this university strives to enhance students' readiness for employment to ensure their optimal performance in professional settings. Presently, a significant number of graduates from the English Department seek employment and are successfully hired as teachers of (ESP). Nevertheless, their pedagogical expertise in teaching (ESP) must be considered sufficient for such objectives. To accomplish this, a combination of classroom observation and interviews was conducted to investigate the perspectives of the three key parties involved in this institution – the administration, ESP instructors, and students. The findings revealed four essential components that should be implemented in ESP courses, but still need to be improved. The key elements include a focus on communication, a learner-centered approach, collaborative teaching methods, and using practical and natural resources. Given the differences between ESP and General English (GE), the Director of the Language Centre must reassess the specific type of ESP suitable for this context. Additionally, teachers willing to handle these classes should thoroughly understand ESP pedagogy, which may require intensive training.

Avi et al. (2021) conducted a descriptive-analytical inquiry on the obstacles faced in teaching (ESP) courses to female preparatory (PY) year students at King Khalid University during the Covid 19 time. The purpose is to gather feedback from teachers and students regarding the current challenges in E-teaching in the context of ESP and propose practical solutions to address them. To gather data, the study used qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews with teachers and questionnaires for students. The data is then analyzed using a descriptive analysis to interpret the findings. The findings reveal an agreement between teachers and students in identifying the key elements that constitute significant difficulties in teaching and studying ESP courses, primarily issues related to technology, pedagogy, and assessment. Given these obstacles, the research proposes pragmatic recommendations to facilitate the virtual instruction and acquisition of ESP courses. The proposed solutions aim to establish adequate standards for virtual ESP teaching and learning within the limitations of high-quality contemporary education.

Luluk and Triastuti (2021) sought to examine the primary obstacles encountered by ESPs instructors in single public and four private institutions of higher education. The data for this qualitative study were acquired via interviews with five teachers with good qualifications and expertise in ESP. The interview questions focused mainly on the candidates' expertise and proficiency in teaching within subject-specific contexts, the sufficiency of (ESP) training, their ability to do needs analysis, and the state of their classroom. The findings indicate that ESP teachers faced several notable obstacles, including a lack of familiarity with students' specific areas of study, a lack of training in ESP, a lack of adequate needs analysis, problems of teaching large classes, and dealing with diverse levels of English proficiency among learners (mixed-ability classes). The results of this study indicate that policymakers (stakeholders) should prioritize the implementation of ESP.

Marawn (2017) presents the results of a study that examines the difficulties encountered by an English instructor while teaching (ESP) in a vocational higher institution in Indonesia. The study used an interpretative inquiry methodology, with the semi-structured interview as the primary data-gathering method. The study utilized (NVivo 8) to facilitate the data analysis process. This approach enables the

identification of the obstacles faced by the teacher in teaching (ESP). This is in many ways relevant to the present study, which seeks to explore the difficulties and changes of teaching ESP in the context of a Saudi college.

In their study, Jiang et al. (2018) examined the difficulties encountered by inexperienced (ESP) teachers and their requirements for support from educational institutions to apply the innovative curriculum effectively. To fill this gap, they created the ESP Teachers' Challenges and Needs Questionnaire (ESP), which 208 inexperienced Chinese ESP teachers filled out. Statistical techniques were employed to detect common trends. The exploratory factor analyses yielded four dimensions describing ESP teachers' primary challenges and demands. In order to ascertain the specific type of institutional assistance required, the researchers carried out semi-structured interviews with six carefully chosen individuals. The results indicate that two types of institutional support are necessary to implement ESP: policy support and financial assistance. These topics are closely associated with self-directed learning, interdisciplinary cooperation, research activities, and pedagogical learning possibilities.

Furthermore, Dwi and Oliver (2017) utilized an ethnographic technique to examine the diverse perspectives of three key parties involved in this institution: employers, professors, and students. The results indicate that every group recognized the significance of English as a worldwide and international language. The findings also indicate that there are some issues present within the institution as a whole, at the faculty level, and in classrooms, which have the potential to impede the efficiency of the ESP programs. The findings guide policymakers, curriculum developers, and English language educators.

Tao and Gao (2018) utilized life-history interview data to analyze the process of identity formation and negotiation among eight (ESP) instructors at a university in China. Based on a modified version of the TESOL teacher identity model (Pennington, 2014), the data analysis showed that the participants in the study underwent a multifaceted process of changing their professional practices and creating their professional identities when becoming ESP teachers. Participants experienced a sense of inherent satisfaction in their teaching efforts, which were focused on equipping graduates with the necessary (ESP) abilities to contribute to the socioeconomic progress of the region. However, the institution's imposition of a marginalized status on ESP undermined their ability to develop professional identities. Given the growing demand for English language teachers to enhance university graduates' (ESP) skills in various educational settings, it is crucial to provide greater focus and assistance to foster ESP teachers' professional growth and identity construction.

To address the challenges of ESP facing Majmaah University's instructors, the present study is designed to seek answers for the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges of teaching ESP at Majmaah University from the viewpoints of ESP instructors?

2. How do ESP instructors at Majmaah University perceive/approach overcoming these challenges?

4. Methodology

This section outlines primarily the methods employed to collect the data. It does so by describing the informants/participants, the data collection method (Focus Group Discussion), validity and reliability issues, ethical considerations, and so on.

4.1 Participants

The Department of English at Majmaah University is a large one with many branches, which were recently all joined together in a single department. With more than 60 faculty members, the department teaches both EFL and ESP to a vast number of students of different specialties, including medicine, engineering, computer science, science, applied sciences, and so on, alongside the B.A. in English level. More than 60 faculty members come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Saudis, Egyptians, Sudanese, Tunisians, Pakistanis, Jordanians, and so on), which very much enriched the data collected. Most of them possess considerable experience in teaching ESP. Most hold either PhD or AM degrees and have published in refereed journals, some in international Scopus and ISI-indexed journals.

4.2 Focus group discussions

This study used the focus group discussion to obtain the relevant data. This kind of study usually lends itself easily to qualitative methods of data collection and analysis as it requires profound exploration of the informants' thinking, feeling, and behaviour (Mwilongo, 2025; Ning et al. 2024; Sachdeva, 2024). Mwilongo (2025) argues that focus group discussions are theoretically based on four paradigms: Social Constructivism (knowledge is socially constructed); Symbolic Interactionism (knowledge is acquired through context-dependent interaction); Interpretivism (people tend to interpret situations and ideas differently enacting their own perspectives, experiences and beliefs); Grounded Theory (data-driven method in which researchers develop ideas and theories out of the data, freeing themselves from pre-conceptions and hypotheses). A group of 63 English language instructors, most of whom with a vast experience and wide expertise in EFL/ESP teaching and research experience and all of whom holding either an MA or PhD in the field, were asked to discuss thoroughly the challenges of teaching ESP in Majmaah University. Importantly, they were asked to reflect on their own experience detaching themselves for some time from what they had read in the field, which might unconsciously affect their own perceptions and ideas of these challenges. The group discussed the issue thoroughly on a cyber forum (WhatsApp group), and this constituted the main data for the study.

The discussions were well moderated by one of the researchers. In many ways, participants were asked to explain, clarify, or elaborate on the points they tackled. As the discussion took place online on a cyber forum, it continued for several days with participants contributing at their convenient time. When a participant voiced out their ideas and stances, drawing on their own experiences, some other participants

would usually step in and write down their thoughts, offering an evaluation of what had been said. The moderator intervened for more focus to direct, redirect, or ask for more clarification while encouraging the participants to continue the lively discussion. The type of moderation, employed here, in many ways, guarded against researcher bias and thus ensuring construct validity and reliability, as will be detailed in the following section.

4.3 Validity and reliability

Focus groups, despite their many benefits and effectiveness for qualitative research, are prone to many challenges, limitations, and problems that may affect the credibility of their findings (Mwilongo, 2025). These may include: moderator bias, group-like-mindedness, lack of effective communication skills on the part of the researcher, and so on. Well-aware of these challenges, the researchers took great pains to ensure that these are overcome as much as possible. The following procedures were taken for that purpose.

• Before the focus discussions were conducted, we planned carefully by setting clearly the research objectives, questions, guide, and so on. This is known in the literature as the "ground rules" (Mwilongo, 2025). This, in turn, facilitated the process for keeping the limitations and risks to a minimum.
Designing a suitable focus group format.

• Given some contextual considerations, we saw the online focus groups as the most suitable and accessible type. We opted to use WhatsApp because it was easier and more accessible as the department members had already been participating in a WhatsApp cyber forum for years, devoted entirely to regularly discussing academic, scientific, and research issues. In addition, WhatsApp discussions enabled participants to send carefully thought-out and written messages, unlike Zoom meetings. The members knew beforehand that the discussion materials in the forum could be used for research purposes, and in fact, other papers by other members of the group likewise used the forum for research purposes. Additionally, they were told about the aims of the study and that their messages would be used for the purpose of this paper only, and they could get their messages removed if they wished; the members of the group usually discuss in the same forum their research papers before and after they are published. At times, the main online focus groups were supported by some forms of mini-focus groups and some random, informal individual face-to-face meetings with a few participants.

• Great attention was paid to moderation for the sake of minimizing moderator bias and maximising moderation quality and effectiveness. The moderator was highly experienced and well-trained with a rich expertise in this kind of research, having previously moderated various other focus group discussions. This, in many important ways, enabled him to avoid biased strategies, manage well the focus group dynamics, track and explore the participants' responses, and so on. For instance, he would largely avoid yes or no questions and tended to ask more open-ended questions to allow for more in-depth discussions. All these measures contributed to the validity and reliability of the findings.

5. Findings

This section presents and analyses the results/findings of the data collected via the main online focus group discussions. The analysis sheds light on factors regarding the difficulties encountered in teaching (ESP) at Majmaah University, as identified by the faculty members participating in the focus groups. It will also highlight these findings in the light of the research context, objectives of the study and scope, and the relevant literature. The following general themes and thoughts emerged from the focus group discussion:

1. Challenges dealing with instructors
2. Challenges dealing with students
3. Challenges dealing with teaching materials and teaching strategies
4. Challenges dealing with evaluation
5. More specific challenges
6. Challenges dealing with the relationship between the language instructor and the subject-matter instructor

In what follows, we discuss details of these themes and then summarize them in Tables 1 and 2, which involve some categories along with a summary of the major quotes and solutions suggested by participants:

5.1 Challenges dealing with instructors

The thematization of the discussion data revealed that participants identified a group of challenges that they see relevant to the performance of the instructors. Instructors appear to struggle with sufficient and appropriate training in teaching ESP, which is many ways, different from teaching GE. For instance, they seem to suffer from the difficulty of special domain terms and concepts (e.g., medicine, engineering, computer science, applied science, and so on), rendering them feeling a bit insecure in the language classroom. Insecurity on the part of the instructor, consequently, yields insecurity on the part of the students. Suggestions for overcoming these challenges encompass the need for in-service training, self-training, and self-learning, alongside keeping good communication with subject-specific instructors to seek help with concepts and terms.

5.2 Challenges dealing with students

Participants expressed many concerns dealing with the students. They pointed out the usually low/insufficient proficiency on the part of the students. They argue that the students' proficiency in English is broadly too low and does not help them be effective ESP learners. This, in their opinion, affects the students' competence to deal particularly with ESP terms and concepts, which also impacts negatively their ability to communicate meaningfully in academic or professional contexts. In the words of one participant, "Students should obtain the knowledge and skills to employ the language to serve the text's function and meaning. It does not mean to acquire the terms; however, it is to assemble the terms and the

knowledge concerned to have a meaningful text convey the potential functions."
This is also congruent with what another participant refers to as the interplay
between micro-level and macro-level language teaching, in which morphological
and grammatical aspects are integrated with pragmatic and discourse ones for
more effective language education. He insightfully stresses that, "We can teach
the micro-linguistic level without detriment to the macro-level (socio-cultural/
socio-pragmatic level."

However, the most crucial issue concerning ESP students and that most participants
seem to be aware of, is related to students' needs. There is a persistent complaint that
students' needs are not given due attention in ESP teaching at Majmaah University.
The needs issue has indeed occupied a great deal of ESP literature almost since its early
inception in the 1960s (Fitria, 2020; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Mohammed & Nur,
2018; Munby, 1978; Suherman & Kertawijaya, 2023; Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017).

Solutions to this part include remedial work suggested by many to tackle the
long-standing issue of inadequate students' proficiency, addressing students' needs
much more sufficiently and effectively, alongside some particular work with teaching
terminology to ease ESP learning.

5.3 Challenges dealing with teaching materials and teaching strategies

The focus discussions also exhibit a dissatisfaction with the materials currently used
at the colleges where ESP courses are provided. For many, the ESP coursebooks
currently in use are inappropriate, outdated, and look more of a GE nature than ESP.
As two participants put it, the materials in current use are generally "Old or outdated
course contents from textbooks.", and that needs analysis of students should be
considered in the process of course design, "The course designer should ask students
about their needs and then design the course according to these needs."
Another problem that surfaced up during the focus discussions is related to teaching
grammar (a long-lasting issue in English language teaching). Participants seem to
struggle with how to teach grammar in an ESP context, inductively or deductively?
Some participants appeared to prefer the more explicit way of grammar teaching.
This can be gleaned from a participant who stressed the utmost significance of "re-
teaching grammar and basic structures for remedial purposes."

Regarding the suggested ways of dealing with the materials issue, most participants
called for reconsidering the current coursebooks. This may involve selecting more
appropriate course books, revising, or alternatively updating the current ones. In the
words of one participant, both the materials and the teaching strategies should follow
a "more flexible, situated, context-sensitive, holistic and dynamic approach."
However, the most telling suggestion voiced out during the discussions was to
prepare supplementary materials which may be collated from different sources in
lieu of merely relying on a single coursebook.

5.4 Challenges dealing with evaluation

One of the pivotal themes emerging out of the focus discussions is how to evaluate
students' performance in the context of ESP at Majmaah University. Within this

theme, the most important categories emphasized repeatedly by the participants are the incongruence between the grades and real performance, on one hand, and the disharmony between instruction and evaluation methods, on the other. Pertinent to the latter is what one participant referred to as *"The dichotomy between the deserved grades and given grades."*

For this reason, participants called for a more realistic evaluation so that grades reflect the reality of the situation. Moreover, to overcome the challenge of the disharmony between instruction and evaluation, participants suggested adopting a holistic, varied, and integrated approach to both instruction and evaluation, hence the concept of the "washback effect" (the impact of assessment of the learning process). Discussants, furthermore, suggested seeking ways to vary the evaluation strategies, a much greater alignment between Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs), together with a more critically-oriented and more task-based evaluation. Critically-oriented evaluation emphasizes and integrates strategies of awareness of social, political, cultural, and power dynamics, collaboration, identity, and agency in the process of language evaluation (Baker & Wright, 2017; Freire, 2000).

5.5 More specific challenges

This type may be difficult to classify, but presumably combines a range of socio-cultural and psycho-social factors, most of which seem out of instructors' control. These may often look intricate and nuanced. This may partly involve the task of not only creating but also maintaining spirit, energy, and motivation among students. One active participant referred to this as, "*addressing the core of the problem   and the possible remedies must be raised and put on the table. Serious surveys and investigation of motivational causes and psychological effects should raise our concern."* Others, while admitting the difficulty of some intricacies that they believe require much more profound research to navigate, appear to be more concerned with sustaining motivational energy than creating it. They suggested that more effective ways should be attempted with regard to motivation, which they say should include selecting and /or updating the current materials used across the university's colleges.

5.6 Challenges dealing with the relationship between the language instructor and subject-specialty instructor

The challenges posed here, with regard to the nature of the relationship between language instructors and subject-specialty instructors, have likewise emerged as one of the major themes in the focus discussions. Many participants expressed some dissatisfaction with their relationship with their field specialist counterparts. In the words of one participant, "much depends on how you request information and express your urgency. If you do not ask, information will not come." This showcases that the problem is summed up in miscommunication and a lack of adequate collaboration. Lack of communication between the two would most likely lead to lack of understanding. In addition, there appears to be the effect of interdisciplinarity,

good in many ways as it indeed is, can pose real challenges due to the different perspectives shaped by long disciplinary thinking, tradition, and practices. However, good communication between interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary instructors/ specialists can, nevertheless, maximise benefits and minimize difficulties. As insightfully put by one participant, "when instructors from various disciplines come together, they bring diverse perspectives and expertise that can significantly enrich the educational experience." Thus, adopting interdisciplinarity, both epistemologically and methodologically, was suggested among the strategies to overcome the challenges of bridging the gap between language and subject-specialty instructors. Other suggested solutions included encouraging more effective communication and collaboration between the two.

It looks imperative now, to remind the readers, of the RQs stated at the end of the literature review, before summarizing the answers in the two tables below:

1. What are the challenges of teaching ESP at Majmaah University from the viewpoints of ESP instructors?

2. How do ESP instructors at Majmaah University perceive/approach overcoming these challenges?

The following Tables (1–2) summarize the key themes and categories of the challenges and problems of ESP teaching as seen by instructors at Majmaah University.

Table 1. *A summary of focus group discussions results (themes and categories 1–3)*

No	Types of challenges	Categories of these challenges	Some details and quotes from participants	Suggested solutions summary
1	Challenges dealing with instructors	- Capacities and training to teach ESP. - Lack of subject-specialty knowledge - Difficulty of understanding some very specific terminology and notions	*"As ESP educators, we're tasked with dual challenge of mastering teaching methodologies and possessing a solid understanding of the content areas we teach."* *One participant sums up his contribution in a series of questions: "Why do we have a turn-off among students studying English? Is the problem cultural or psychological? Does it go to a very complex inability in us as doctors who are unable to reach any kind of consistent acculturation at a time, we berate the West? Is this reflected in our flip to Arabic in our classes instead of English?"*	- More in-service training in ESP. - Seeking help from subject-specialty instructors alongside self-training in the specific field.

Continued

2	Challenges dealing with students	- Low and unsatisfactory proficiency level	- *"Students complain that ESP at their level is too complicated, too much work, and that they are not used to it, given their past training in a bilingual environment."*	- Some participants voiced out suggestions for remedial work to boost proficiency.
		- Students' needs not addressed	- *"The main challenge is the students' ability to grasp ESP materials."* - *"Self-learning by the teachers and students."* (the instructor quoted here is arguing that both students and instructors need to self-learn course contents).	- Students needs should be analysed and addressed. - While ESP is not merely terminology teaching, technical terms should be clearly explained and used properly in appropriate contexts.
		- Struggling with specific content and specific terms		
3	Challenges dealing with teaching materials and teaching strategies	- Inappropriate course books	- *"Old or outdated course contents from textbooks."*	- Selecting more appropriate textbooks
		- Old materials/ more GE than ESP course books.	- "There should be needs analysis. The course designer should ask students about their needs and then design the course according to these needs."	- Updating currently used ESP materials -Using supplementary materials alongside main textbooks
		- Problems with grammar teaching	- "ESP cannot be reduced into merely terminology teaching."	- While the syllabus may change relatively slower, coursebooks should preferably be changed faster.
		- Students' needs are not adequately addressed or taken into consideration.	- "A more flexible, situated, context-sensitive, holistic and dynamic approach would presumably be more commendable."	
		- Instructors keep teaching the same coursebook for too long a time.	- The importance of "*Re-teaching grammar and basic structures for remedial purposes.*" "*Course contents to commensurate with the specific needs(sic).*" Instructor here expressing discontent with the coursebooks used in teaching ESP.	

Table 2. *A summary of focus group discussions results (themes and categories 4–6).*

No	Types of challenges	Categories of these challenges	Some details and quotes from participants	Suggested solutions summary
4	Challenges dealing with real evaluation	- Lack of congruence between grades and real performance - Lack of realism/harmony between instruction and evaluation	- *"The dichotomy between the deserved grades and given grades."*	- Seeking a more realistic and balanced evaluation method - Varying evaluation strategies and aligning them with CLOs and PLOs. - Integrating evaluation with instruction - Using wash-back - Using critical evaluation methods.
5	More specific challenges	- Some issues probably lying outside teacher control - Creating motivation and sustaining it to avoid demotivation and loss of interest	- *"Addressing the core of the problem and the possible remedies must be raised and put on the table. Serious surveys and investigation of motivational causes and psychological effects should raise our concern."*	- Doing more research to explore some more subtle issues in ESP - Seeking ways to motivate students and maintain that motivation as long as possible (e.g., using appropriate and updated course materials)
6	Challenges dealing with the relationship between the language instructor and subject-specialty instructor	- Lack of cooperation - Miscommunication - Lack of mutual understanding	- Regarding collaboration, some participants said:"…much depends on how you request information and express your urgency. If you do not ask, information will not come." - "When instructors from various disciplines come together, they bring diverse perspectives and expertise that can significantly enrich the educational experience." - "Collaboration is imperative not only for gaining content knowledge but also for exchanging ideas about the needs of students."	- More collaboration needed between the language instructor and the subject/field-specialty instructor - More effective communication required between the language instructor and the subject/field-specialty instructor - Adopting an interdisciplinary approach on the part of both language instructor and the subject/field-specialty instructor.

The points in Tables 1 and 2 above provide a rich and varied approach of how ESP challenges are construed and the ways in which they can be dealt with in the context of Majmaah University ESP faculty members. The six types of challenges, along with their subcategorization, reflect deep thinking about the challenges they face in teaching ESP. In addition, the tables provide a summary of the solutions put forward by the participants who took part in the focus discussions, which also delineate the extent to which they take these challenges seriously.

6. Discussion

This section interprets the results/findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the study's objectives, research questions, and the literature. Besides, the implications of the study will be discussed (pedagogical, for policy-making and for future research). In general, these results suggest that participants are well aware of most challenges facing them in teaching ESP and can conceptualise them. They also propounded solution suggestions drawing from their class experiences and expertise. In what follows, we discuss this thoroughly.

The interpretations of these results/findings in relation to the research questions and the existing literature will follow.

RQ 1. What are the challenges of teaching ESP at Majmaah University from the viewpoints of ESP instructors?

The results drawn from the participants recruited to focus on discussing the challenges they often face in teaching ESP and which have been portrayed in the previous section and summed up in Tables 1 and 2. The challenges, as shown in the tables, are categorized into six types, each subcategorized into several subtypes supported by explanations and quotes alongside suggested solutions. The six types include challenges with: ESP instructors, students, teaching materials, evaluation, more specific/more subtle challenges, and finally, the relationships between language instructors and subject-matter specialist instructors. As the analyses exhibit, each type showcases a number of subtypes (see Tables 1 and 2).

The discussions clearly indicate instructors struggle with ESP content materials. Thus, not only students who suffer from dealing with technical vocabulary, expressions, and styles, but also their instructors, rendering them feeling somehow insecure. An insecure instructor will naturally result in an insecure student. In addition, the focus discussions disclose a lack of adequate collaboration between language instructors and subject-specialty instructors. There are of course various interactions and intersections between all these elements, as is detailed recurringly in this study. The lack of adequate collaboration between the language and subject-specialty instructors probably contributes to the content-knowledge difficulties language instructors usually face while also hindering the subject-specialty from voicing the students' needs from their own viewpoints.

With regard to students' challenges, the participants appear to agree that the proficiency of most students is too low or unsatisfactory. This problem, as revealed

in the discussions, is complex and long-standing, and its roots go back to school education (General Education). Participants, likewise, reflect on the negligence of addressing students' needs in the current ESP programmes at Majmaah University. Another important challenge to students discussed by participants is the fact that students struggle with specific content and specific terms. This challenge becomes all the more complex when added to the fact that language instructors themselves struggle with more or less the same problem. Additionally, many instructors are clearly worried about how to create motivation for their students and how to maintain it. Motivation is not easy to maintain for a sustainable period of time, even if successfully created. Relevantly, Marwan (2017) reveals that ESP students are generally less motivated than English for General Purposes, which necessitates that ESP instructors seek more effective strategies to both motivate and keep motivating students.

Challenges are also expressed with regard to student evaluation. This includes the incongruence between students' grades and their real performance. Relatedly, participants seem to be aware of the disharmony between strategies of evaluation and strategies of instruction. The problem is long-standing and is not confined to ESP only; It is rife in EFL and language education in general. The integration of teaching and evaluation is usually labeled "wash-back" and it is discussed abundantly in the literature of evaluation (Marwan, 2017).

2. How do ESP instructors at Majmaah University perceive/approach overcoming these challenges?

In response to this question, participants ventured a range of ideas, thoughts, and perceptions. In the following, we explore their stances.

Concerning the challenges facing instructors, the participants suggest several ways to deal with them. Continuous in-service training has been voiced by many as a key strategy to overcome most of the challenges instructors struggle with. In fact, in-service training has commonly become pivotal in honing the knowledge and skills of academics. Self-learning is another strategy to overcome the challenges. Instructors need to self-improve in the type and domain of ESP they are teaching.

Regarding the challenges in relation to the students, the focus discussions reveal some solutions. First, remedial work has been suggested to improve students' English proficiency. Second, students' needs should be addressed. This has been repeatedly mentioned over the focus discussions. They presumably mean not only providing the relevant ESP materials to students, but also pointing out to catering for some technical, linguistic, and stylistic issues. These may require conducting a needs analysis before, during, and after the end of the terms. This is valid, and there is a vast literature supporting it (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Li, 2014; Hans & Hans, 2015; Poedjiastutie, 2017; Mohammed & Nur, 2018; Stefaniak, 2020). However, it is worth noting that participants, whilst discussing many aspects of needs analysis, did not mention the more recent innovative approaches in needs analysis in ESP. Among the latter is the Holistic Multidimensional perspective to needs analysis, which include not only the linguistic needs, but also the students' communicative, strategic, and socio-cultural needs. Similarly, the new perspectives include the Technology-based and AI-generated needs analysis (e.g., about the effective use of

and AI and corpora in needs analysis), Critical Needs Analysis (which activates the dimension of equality and power dynamics).

Participants, meanwhile, discussed meticulously the challenges of dealing with teaching materials and teaching strategies and put forward some solutions (see Table 1) (Gray, 2013). The use of more appropriate course books alongside updating some currently used ESP materials have been brought up as key potential solutions. What is more, it has also been propounded that instructors better use supplementary materials which could be adapted and collated from different sources. The supplementary materials allow for more freedom on the part of both the instructors and the students as students can presumably take part in preparing them (as part of the stage of continuous needs analysis). Instruction strategies are recommended to be varied, dynamic, and context-sensitive. In particular, the use of projects has been touted by many participants as they may enhance and sharpen, among other things, self-learning skills.

By the same token, student evaluation should be varied, realistic, and more balanced. Providing a wealth of perspectives, discussants are inclined to see instruction and evaluation as more integrated and much more alignment between CLOs and PLOs. Furthermore, some participants suggest employing critical assessment methods that integrate socio-cultural dimensions into the process of evaluation. The alignment between PLOs and CLOs cannot be overstated as it plays a significant role in: improving curriculum design, reinforcing students' motivation (Marwan, 2017) and ensuring the validity and reliability of the overall assessment. These suggested solutions are significant and generally comport with the recent tendencies in the field of evaluation and assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Suskie, 2009).

Respecting the kind of challenges categorized in the study as "more specific", participants indicate that these are somehow subtle, intricately invisible, and changing. Within this, they express concerns about how to create motivation and engagement and how to keep them alive throughout the course. Tackling this problem involves updating materials, keeping abreast of recent developments in ESP. This may include, on the part of the instructor, promoting some communication and Emotional Intelligence skills (e.g., developing empathy skills).

Another central challenge discussed is the degree of communication and collaboration between the language instructor and the subject-specialty instructor. This appears to be a common problem in ESP contexts (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Bracaj, 2014, Suherman & Kertawijaya, 2023). Solutions include urging the language instructor and subject-specialist to fully collaborate, candidly discuss concerns, and constantly and effectively communicate. This is particularly in line with Suherman and Kertawijaya (2023) who find that ESP teachers often resort to collaborate with subject-specific teachers in order to overcome some of the challenges they face in teaching ESP. Importantly, interdisciplinarity has been suggested as an effective theoretical framework for dealing with this kind of particular challenge and all sorts of academic challenges, for that matter. Both interdisciplinarity and ESP foster creativity, innovation, diversity, criticality, good communication, problem-solving, and collaboration in both research and education (Kaur & Tuli, 2024).

7. Implications

Implications of the study are of various types: pedagogical, policy-making, and future research. Pedagogical implications incorporate the call for more fruitful collaboration between language instructor and subject-specific instructor, emphasizing the priority of needs analysis to improve academic and professional learning outcomes of ESP courses and relatedly improving teaching materials by selecting the most appropriate ones for students and then supplementing them with some tailored or collated materials. Policy-making implications encompass reviewing educational language planning to allow for better ESP decisions, such as providing in-service training for ESP instructors. For future research and based on the findings of this study, it looks plausible to suggest the following:

• In our context, researchers may consider focusing on the challenges and problems hindering or affecting the collaboration between language instructors and subject-specialist instructors.

• The findings of this study revealed that the existence of many concerns respecting the needs of the students. Future researchers should consider more in-depth focus on needs analysis.

• Based on the findings that the challenges include issues with materials currently used at Majmaah University, to the extent of the need to provide supplementary materials, more extended research may explore the issue further.

• This research utilised primarily the method of Focus Group Discussions and while it has been useful and innovative in its context, future researchers may consider combining it with other methods such as questionnaires or extensive interviews. In addition, and as this study explored the challenges from the stances of instructors, future research may consider probing the topic from the students' at that.

The contribution of this study lies significantly on its tackling the currently resurgent issue of the challenges of ESP teaching in the context of Saudi Arabia universities by highlighting the case of Majmaah University. The resurgence conceivably stems from Saudi Vision 2030 (The grand strategy and master plan of the Kingdom launched in 2016 to diversify the Saudi Arabian economy and society), in which science and technical programmes are encouraged and well-funded (new technical diploma programmes have recently been introduced in Saudi universities and colleges). The introduction of these new programmes has necessitated the need for much more ESP education. This tendency comports with the global resurgence of interest in ESP discussed in the literature (see the Literature Review section). Besides, Focus Group Discussions are not commonly used tools to collect data in ESP/EFL research in Saudi Arabia. Using them effectively and skillfully to collect in-depth data concerning the challenges facing ESP teaching has presumably been among the innovations of this study. Theoretically, the use of this method supports the global interest in the grounded theory (data-driven qualitative research in which theory springs out of data and not on pre-set theories or hypotheses). The field of ESP might likewise benefit considerably from the study's uncovering of some of the participants' intricate thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, which were a result of the profound analysis of the Focus Group data (see theme and category number 5 in Table 2 and the Findings section).

8. Conclusion

This section sums up the results and discusses some limitations of the study.

9. Summary of Results

This study navigated the challenges ESP instructors at Majmaah University usually face and the ways and strategies they employed to overcome them along with their perceptions and their suggestions for overcoming them. To that end, the study utilised the online focus discussions method (WhatsApp cyber forum) to recruit participants and get them to profoundly and lengthily probe the many classrooms challenges they often encounter and the different ways they attempted to deal with them. The discussions spanned weeks of participants voicing their takes at their most convenient time, and the moderator managing the process carefully and cautiously to avoid moderator bias, and hence, contributing to the validity and reliability of the findings.

The findings reveal that ESP instructors at Majmaah University are struggling with a wide range of challenges. These include challenges with respect to: instructors, students, teaching materials and strategies, evaluation, the relationship between language instructor and subject-specific instructors alongside some very specific, though uneasily labelled kind of challenges. In each of these categories, participants voiced out their concerns, difficulties, and intricate experiences. In addition, a range of solutions to these challenges have been envisaged and put forward (see Tables 1 and 2). Similarities with the conclusions of some other studies include the crucialness of needs analysis, the imperativeness of collaboration between the language instructor and the specific field instructor, the practicality and authenticity of teaching materials, the importance of integrating technology into ESP education, and so on (Iswati & Triastuti, 2021; Martinez, 2018; Smith, 2015; Thompson, 2019).

Though the findings/results of this study/findings, are in many ways also concurring with what many similar studies have uncovered, some important differences could still be gleaned. The focus discussions, which were carried out online via a cyber forum, together with the skillfulness and expertise of the moderator allowed for more depth, reflection and profound thinking. The moderator kept asking the discussants repeatedly to considerably draw on their own experience, which discerned rich thoughts and emotions. This methodological difference between our study and many other similar studies, particularly in the study's national and local context, and which mostly used a questionnaire/interview-based design, provided the findings with more depth and complexity along with an introspective dimension. At least, in its context, and to the best of our knowledge, it is the first study of its kind to use the Focus Group Discussion Method to explore ESP challenges from the instructors' standpoints. This might have resulted, among other things, in the participants' awareness of the existence of some very intricate challenges not easily classifiable and which we categorized under the label "More Specific Challenges" (see Table 2).

Other differences may include some of the thoughts and suggestions provided by some participants regarding how to overcome the challenges they face in teaching ESP. Major among these solutions encompass a philosophy of interdisciplinarity on

the part of both the ESP and subject-specific instructors and educators, in general. Interdisciplinarity involves, among other things, the ability to see the problem from the perspectives of the other field specialists' (Awadelkarim, 2019; Kaur & Tuli, 2024; Martinez, 2018). Additionally, the solutions or strategies to overcome the challenges, comprise the integration of instruction and evaluation (washback effect), developing collated supplementary materials that could cater for the elements and strategies not covered or not adequately covered in the textbooks together with providing instructors with more in-service training. The largely unclassifiable set of difficulties which the informants/participants mentioned and reflected on, likewise make our study stand out, not necessarily, as sui generis, but as methodologically revealing and distinct, in several ways.

10. Limitations

The results/findings of the study have been limited by a number of factors. First, this study focused on the challenges of ESP teaching at college level from the perspectives of instructors. This might have limited its findings in some way as the students' perspectives were not examined. Second, the participants included 63 instructors whose experience and training in ESP teaching vary considerably and this might have influenced the findings in some important ways. Third, the study used the focus group discussion method innovatively but we, nevertheless, believe the findings could have been better if combined and triangulated with other qualitative and quantitative methods.

   Notwithstanding all these limitations and delimitations, the study has filled a real gap in ESP research in the context of Majmaah University, used innovative qualitative design, and its results have uncovered that instructors face many challenges and struggle with many difficulties. The analysis of the data has revealed six categories of challenges (outlined in Tables 1 and 2), and a range of solutions were suggested for each of them.

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Sea and Spar Between: Coding Dickinson's and Melville's Poetics of Nature and the Divine

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Abstract Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville's poetics of nature and the divine are deeply intertwined. In their writing, they often use natural imagery and symbolism to explore their philosophical and religious beliefs. Dickinson's poems, for example, often depict nature as a source of both beauty and mystery, while Melville's novels often explore the relationship between the individual and the vastness of the natural world. Nick Montfort and Noah Wardrip–Fruin's generative poem "Sea and Spar Between" draws on Dickinson and Melville's work in several ways. First, the poem uses natural imagery and symbolism to create a vast and ever-changing poetic landscape. Second, the poem explores many of the same metaphysical questions that Dickinson and Melville explored, such as the nature of God, the relationship between the individual and the universe, and the meaning of human existence. This paper will explore how Montfort and Strickland's poem reinterprets Dickinson and Melville's poetics of nature and the divine. It will do so through a close analysis of the poem's use of natural imagery and symbolism, a comparison of the poem's depiction of nature and the divine to Dickinson and Melville's depictions. A consideration of the role of the computer algorithm in the poem's reinterpretation of Dickinson and Melville's poetics, and a discussion of the implications of Montfort and Strickland's poem for our understanding of the natural world and the divine. This paper will be of interest to scholars of digital humanities, literary studies, and religious studies. It will also be of interest to a general audience, as it explores the relationship between nature, the divine, and technology, which are all themes that are relevant to contemporary society.

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1. Introduction

Sea and Spar Between is a sonnet created by Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland, circulated in *Dear Navigator* in 2010. Winter Anthology reprinted the poem in 2012. The sonnet comprises nearly 225 trillion two-line stanzas, created through script taken from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and *Emily Dickinson's works*. It involves a net of stanzas in dark blue sans serif font balanced on a brighter blue setting. Every verse is given coordinates from 0, 0 to 14992383, and 14992383. A group of coordinates is presented in a white manuscript directly above the stanza that is assembled in the center of the display. The authors may pilot the sonnet by implementing keyboard instructions or mouse engagements and connections. The audience could similarly write through particular coordinates to an icon at the midpoint of the display.

Leonardo Flores states that coordinates define a recursive exterior where 0, 0 stays together to 14992383, 14992383. The sonnet's structure, which he observes, "*not a flat recording with limits, but a rounded one with the end looping back to the start*." Piloting an enormous sonnet therefore places compression on what shows to possess commencements, conclusions, interiors, and boundaries. Enormous as sonnet is, the writing that makes it, as Montfort and Strickland state, "*is fairly small and simple.*" Code-generating sonnet includes fewer fonts than the folder that suits vector fonts.

Comparing sonnet and code reinscribes the retained opposition situated in Melville's and Dickinson's original works. As observed, "*start*" and "*conclusion*" couplets are adjacent to each other in a reliable manner; the poem holds positive symbolic regularity. Similar to the regularity, the stanzas also frequently validate recurrent structures, subjects, and spatial connections. Recursiveness proposed by the introductory "*circle on*" is concealed by concluding necessities *"another! Again!"* Introductory line *"on"* that concurrently hints at determination and measure across an exterior, in the third line changes into a firm "*one*" starting melodies of harmony and distinctiveness.

In addition, sonnet textures include subjects such as harmony and distinctiveness with nature and components. Nearby stanzas, 14992383, and 14992383, "*closes*" the sonnet by reiterating most of the stanzas 0, and 0. It initiates through 0, 0's closing lines – "*one air one air one air one air another! Again!*" and it ends with 0, 0's smoothly vague conclusion concerning *terra firma* – "*but artless is the earth*." "*Sea and Spar Between*"; therefore, interweaves Dickinson's concern about margins of self with Melville's marine fascinations. An individual continually hesitates between familiarity and unfriendliness.

The presence of strong language reiterations in sonnets represents different methods, such as constructions learned to create sonnets since early time specimens. Christopher Strachey's 1952 "*Love Letters*," as a specimen, organizes a highly constrained quantity in the provision of discovering wish's variability. With "*Sea and Spar Between*," non-infinite but enormous ground formed by sonnets appears toward fixing couplets, concentrating them like rolling surfs, one after the other. An individual may effortlessly misplace their stance. Through the last brush of the control panel, one's place alterations. Misplacing coordinates for a couplet indicates

that an individual will not ever find that stanza again. The stanza that develops an approach to repurpose the sonnet's doubtful roots is forever gone.

2. Author's Testimonial

Sea and Spar between is a rhyme creator that describes a linguistic space occupied by several stanzas similar to the number of fish in the ocean, about 225 trillion. Two coordinates show every stanza. Stanzas vary between 0 0 to 14992383: 14992383. To activate coordination, you can shift control. Touch the spacebar to spot a couplet in the center of the display, instantly taking its coordinates into the navigation box at the end to observe and resend them to this sight. Then, shift your mouse to the right verge of the monitor to shift right to a different expanse of the scripts to increase the primary coordinate. Next, push your mouse at the finale to change correspondingly in those ways; then hit the arrow keys to change the noticeable active lattice of couplets. After that, scroll the wheel and tap the A and Z keys on the control panel to zoom in/out. Write a couple of coordinates in the navigation box at the end and click enter to shift everywhere in oceanic text. Couplets and expressions in Sea and Spar Between arise from Dickinson and Melville's rhymes. Specific compound words collected from verses are often implemented individually or together. Sea and Spar Between was written by implementing a simple digital calculation method that accepts quantitative analysis of fictional scripts. We measured, for example, differences of views that were implemented by only one of the authors. I also observed definite, effortlessly counted, distinctive classes of arguments, such as those conclusions in "less." The human equivalent component included choosing small examples of lyrics from the poets' lexes and creating uncommon techniques of creating lines. I conducted this not quantitatively but relating to my extensive association with the unique textual measures and linguistic signs of Melville and Dickinson. Subsequent code expresses the floor in depth. A first-line practice either:

    i.   Short Line.
    ii. One Noun Line, or
    iii. Compound Course Line.

A second-line uses either:

    i.   Rise and Go Line.
    ii. But Line.
    iii. Exclaim Line, or
    iv. Nailed Line.

The methods by which these particular natures of lines are created, and the methods by which couplets are organized, can be outlined in a JavaScript database that uses Sea and Spar Between. A database that comprises collections and holds implemented lexicons is trivial and plain. An example, Sea and Spar Between codes, with no comments, has a smaller number of fonts than the organizer, which uses a vector font. Screenshots below show Montfort and Strickland's "*Sea and Spar Between*" poems generator (Montfort, 2009).
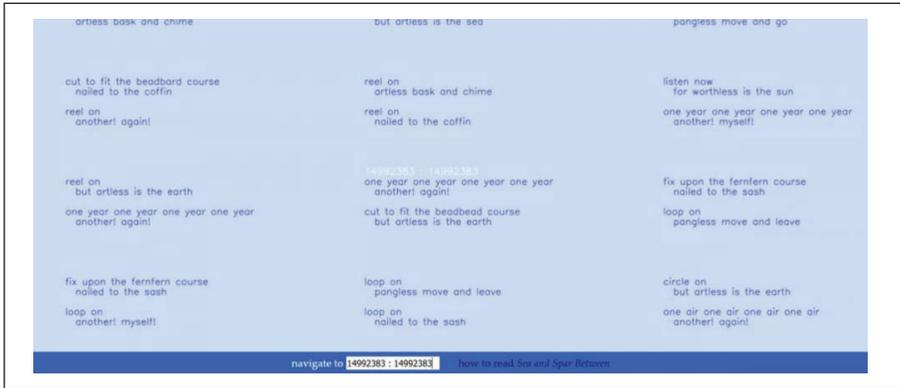
Figure 1. *Montfort and Strickland's Poetry Generator of "Sea and Spar Between" based on Dickinson and Melville poems' text*
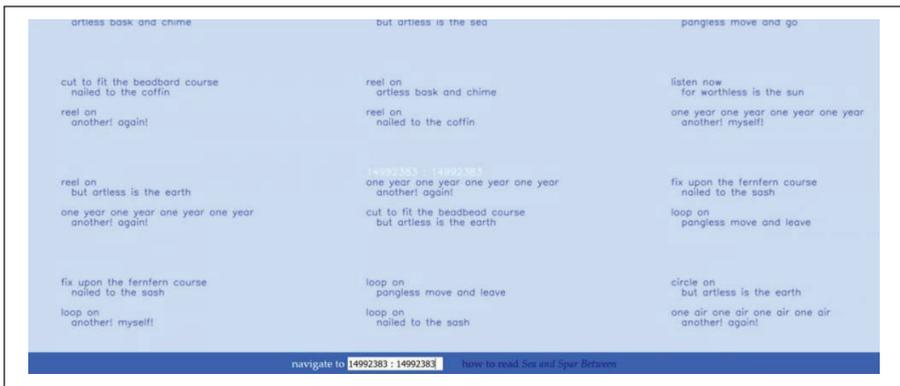

Figure 2. *Montfort and Strickland's Poetry Generator of "Sea and Spar Between" based on Dickinson and Melville poems' text*

1.2 Code comments: Dickinson and Melville's poetics of nature and the divine

For this research, I chose "*Sea and Spar Between*", a collection of work between Stephanie Strickland and Nick Montfort through 14,992,383 places, generating 225 trillion couplets, unevenly extent, which is approximately the number of fish in the ocean. Quantities are overwhelming, and designated words presented on display when zoomed in to the farthest-out zoom place are merely a small percentage of the entire theoretical image.

The sensation is certainly of being "*lost at sea*," emphasized by the thrilling compassion to arrow actions, causing an extremely "*nervous feeling*". It is probable, though, to discover oneself in such an ocean of expressions through residing in the latitude/longitude location offered at display bottom. This change results in a similar group of lexis shown on display as presented earlier at that place, conceptually. Image predates in completeness, although in use, an actual small share shown on
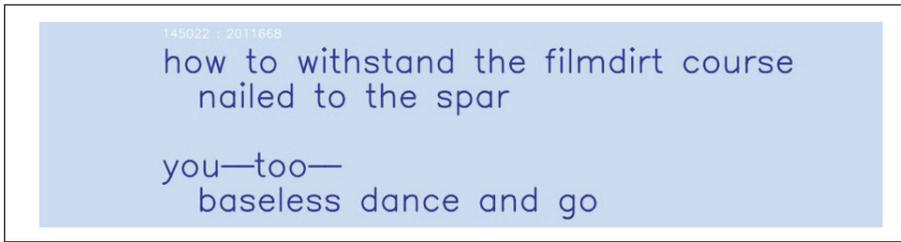
Figure 3. *Sea Spar and Between*
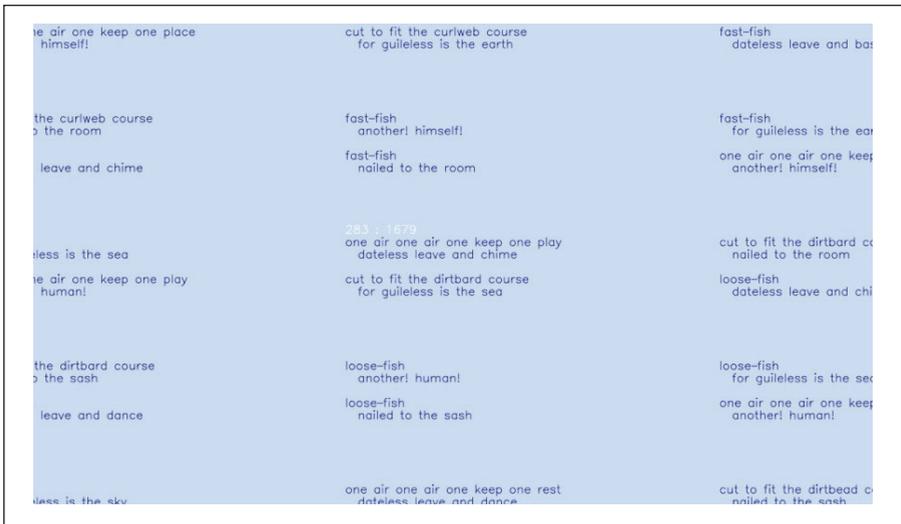
Figure 4. *Sea Spar and Between*

display at specified interval is calculated "*on the fly*," since retaining a huge image in recollection would be excessive. Moulthrop (24) states that couplets that fall outside the noticeable choice are not created. Strickland (2010; p.25) sees the stanza as the core of the work as "compression," based on calculation to decrease intolerably great statistics to a realistically available scale.

Further, influence is a type of technical awe-inspiring, in which writers observe one of their observations. At these footings, they indicated, we consider an abundance surpassing standard, social measure, joined with a dizzying struggle of alignment where rhymes seem as stanza pairs. The writers describe positions on the demonstration screen via "*latitude*" and "*longitude*". As Moulthrop inscribes (26), Sea and Spar Between requests the audience to dip or scan a deep-sea stretch of meanings. *"We do not build, we browse*". Montfort and Strickland strengthen the indication of audience mislaid at the ocean in the co-written paper, "*Spars of Language Lost at Sea*". They state chance does not go into work until readers release it and start reading (27): It is the person who reads Sea and Spar Between, who is placed arbitrarily in a sea of couplets every time she goes back to the sonnet. *"It is you, reader, who are random"*.
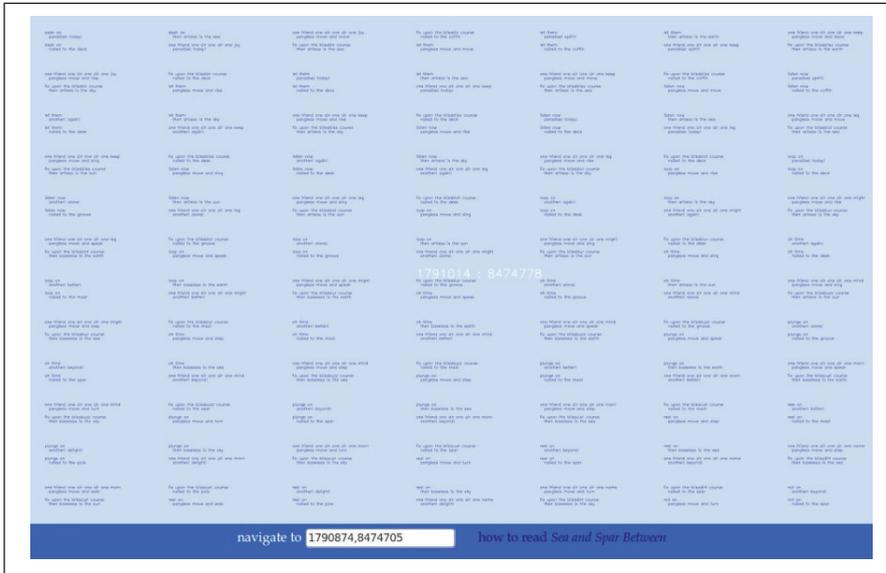
Figure 5. *Sea Spar and Between*

"An uncommon character who is noticed as explanations (that is, non-executable statements), is the writer's paper within the source code entitled "*Cut to fit the tool spun course*", is an expression produced through the database. Notes assuring human decisions showed great contribution in the collection of the text, while additional computational supremacy was used to produce the screen show to provide the feature of "jerky" actions. The writers' statement:

> //most of the code in Sea and Spar Between is used to manage the
>
> //interface and to draw the stanzas in the browser's canvas region. Only
>
> //2609 bytes of the code (about 22%) are used to combine text
>
> //fragments and generate lines. The remaining 5654 bytes (about 50%)
>
> //deals with the display of the stanzas and with interactivity.

In distinction, the texts' choice was an analog process, instinctively directed by the writers' visual and literary deep feelings. The writers, however, clarify that the pattern for creating lines is significantly more multifaceted than in "Taroko Gorge". The varieties comprise compound words (kennings) with diverse rubrics prevailing on how opening and concluding lines are created, as indicated in the previous examples.

To generate the kennings, the CPU pulls from two multiple displays, joins the two arrays, and separates them orderly. In this paper, what does the CPU code do? Its codes show limits on how to pull an image, trace opinions on a two-dimensional exterior, and address the operator's appeal used for specified latitude and longitude. Furthermore, it can calculate words' parts and syllables that chain to create kennings.

It distinguishes how writers remark to create every form of line, collect couplets, and pull a frame of couplets in the browser, and track income and related measures. It identifies when contributions from readers were acknowledged and discerns what to do in reply to a specified contribution. What it does not distinguish are the semantic connotations of lexis and fictional allusions evoked by particular mixtures of words. However, the choice of computer's meanings surpasses the typecast "rule book" of Searle's believed research. In replicating the greater meaning of this cooperation, writers sketch what they realize as users' participation as responders and critics.

> *//Our final claim: the most useful critique*
>
> *//is a new constitution of elements. On one level, a reconfiguration of a*

To this point, "*new constitution*" cannot be used without the processer's data, meanings, and views; the processer develops to be not simply a means to show effects of human imagination collaborating in the development.

3. Digital literary influences

An influence study is one of the traditional methods of literary criticism. It relates to the influence of one writer on the other. That is, renowned writers struggle alongside the effect of their ancestors to achieve a place in literary theory (Bloom, 1973) based on the notion of the theory of poetry. For authors generating numerical literature, software stages use a comparable firm pressure, opening certain routes and struggling or delaying others in techniques that meaningfully form the final work. For instance, M.D Coverley is one of the strong authors who succeeded in implementing push-and-pull software influence in 2018. She began with a simple idea, roughly, a title of a paragraph, which reflects the benefit of ease. This is balanced by extreme loading times that are undesirable for digital authors wishing to retain operators involved: excessively long delays, and they are likely to click somewhere else. Such discussions on the software correspondences lead to real configuration practices and ultimately guide how it will change, but these decisions might constrain many elements of the message (Coverley, 2018).

However, Literacy influence and software processing involve three stages of development: writing, correction, and assessment of moving images that an author wishes to implement. Within these three stages, there are great arrangements that an author should consider when using digital literature, such as organizing, rearranging, cropping, editing, expanding specific thoughts, junking others, or starting over many times. It is important that pictures and sounds, rather than lexis, appear originally in compositional use, maybe because image description and audio are restricted to the relative opportunity of spoken meaning that is endless. The software confirms the literary work is achievable, then descriptions and audios, and then verbal expression. Therefore, once all the related components are in a position to understand how economical the author may be with text. If something presently shows in the pictures, audio, video recorder, and so on. Then an author is required to refer circuitously to an aspect in an authentic text (Coverley, 2018).

It is notable that Coverley, who started as a novelist before becoming a digital poet, puts expressions at the end in her compositional repetition and perceives them in several methods by means of accompaniments to non-verbal digital entities found in position. This keeps the author's practice parallel to video creation rather than literary expression, though of much-reduced choice as it may be achieved through a single author or maybe two other co-authors. Surprisingly, this evocative writing can be distributed through a multimedia plot. This mode of script is the main ecstasy for authors. Here is digital influence at the deepest level, which converts authors' vision of story writing to provide new types of rewards that result in additional productivity and consideration.

The idea is not the impact of particular software and the functional display place. However, these are still important, and somewhat the setting in which authors perceive their effort to develop and get viewers is greater. To discover similar settings in traditional influence research, which may be referred to as approaching fictional idolization in Bloom's theory, a dynamic inspiring strength that drives writers ahead in optimism of realizing certain types of legendary immortality.

Digital era immortality is an additional problem, as the ground of e-literature is with difficulties of display, place uselessness, and media unreachability. Yet, the provoking view of getting an enormous number of viewers without going through traditional publication entries and the chance to test with multimodal compositional uses operate in corresponding conduct to literary idolization, the ideal assurances that mark it all appear useful. In addition, this is *merely* thinkable because of interacting nets. This is the huge common meaning where processors are symbionts, easing, and allowing resourceful uses that could not be in their modern forms without them.

4. Digital authorship

Sea and Spar Between raises no method of artificial intelligence. They vary from the Evolution that creates such a request. Montfort and Strickland keep this explanation clear:

> //These rubrics [*governing how the stanzas are created*] are easy; there is no elegant AI design; //or knowledgeable numerical procedure at work here.

On the contrary, *Evolution*, a cooperative piece of poetry produced by Johannes Heldén and Håkan Jonson, considers digital contribution one stage further, from collaborator to co-producer, or enhanced maybe poetic opponent, automatically to remove expressions of Heldén's original. Heldén is a real fount of knowledge, not only composing poems but also generating pictorial drawings, carving, and comprehensive art. His literary work often included descriptions, and he displayed a platform for his work in diverse media. Jonson, a digital computer operator by day, generates graphics and audio, in which their cooperation on *Evolution* reveals manifold abilities of both writers. The writers inscribe in the introduction the final objective to achieve. Alan Turing (1951) states that

when fresh poetry that bears resemblance to the effort of the original writer is generated via an algorithm, is it probable to create a difference between "writer" and "programmer"? (Evolution, 2013). These queries are better perceived when enclosed by the real mechanisms of the program ontologically and conceptually. During the 2013 version, digital composition contributed to a record of ten of the then-extant reproduction records of Hélden's poems. An academic model of this documentary body was generated by implementing an arithmetical model branded as a Markov Chain, a separate state procedure that changes arbitrarily step-wise via the information, every following phase depending merely on the current position and not on preceding ones.

These inherited algorithms operate on an evolutionary model. Through every cohort, a family of algorithms is generated by presenting differences via a chance kernel. These are, at that time, assessed as meeting certain suitability standards as the most appropriate. In this respect, appropriateness criteria are based on Heldén's style components. The impression is to choose a child algorithm production that carefully contends with Heldén's rhythmical applications. Such an algorithm's productivity is implemented to adapt the script, either through substituting term(s) or through altering how a wedge of white space proposes, for instance, placing a word in the white space initially, in which all the spaces are coded as separate letters via three-dimensional coordinates on sheets, signified in the database as suggesting components.

The line offers an open book with a light grey background and black font. On the left side is a selection between English and Swedish, and a slider governing
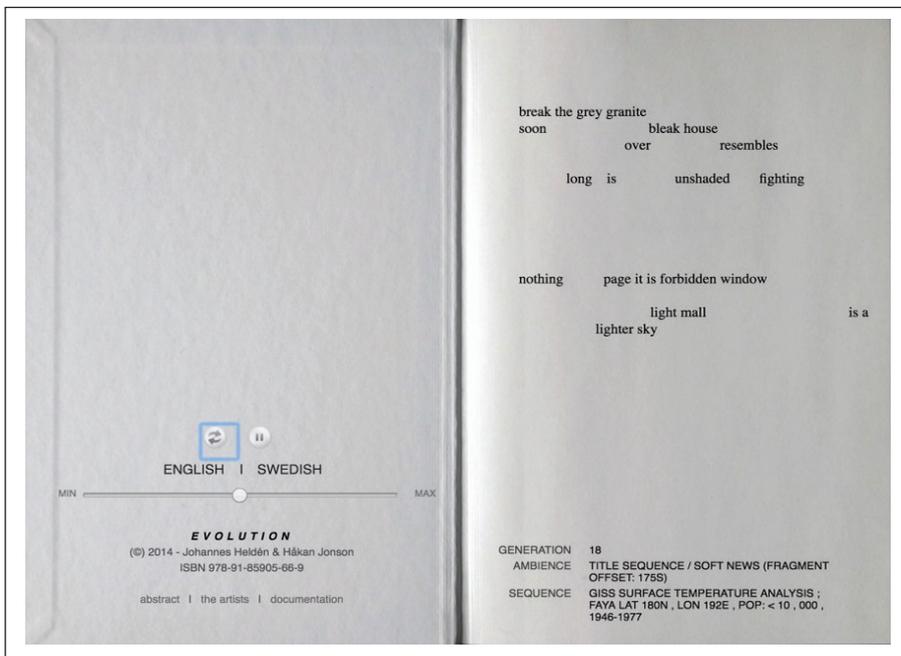

Figure 6. *Sea Spar and Between*

how quickly the script changes. On the right side is a manuscript, with lexis and white spaces organized as if on a reproduction sheet. As the operator guards, text variations, modifications, and small white box blazes to show spaces experiencing transformation that may be unseen if substituted by additional space. Every time the database is accessed, one of Heldén's rhymes is selected as the beginning point, and the show commences after a few hundred repetitions have already occurred. That is, writers believe this would be exciting than beginning the commencement. At the sheet's foot, the number of generations is shown beginning from zero, ignoring preceding repetitions that previously occurred.

As shown database is implemented to create arbitrary kernels. Database variations with every cohort and a sum of eighteen varied databases implemented, extending from imaging the form of exoplanetary systems, to "GISS surface temperature" for particular latitude/longitude and series of dates, to "cups of coffee per episode of *Twin Peaks*" (*Evolution*, 2014). Spirited collections combine social objects with land-dwelling ecological parameters with astral information, proposing that evolutionary procedure be situated through extensively changing settings. Determination's audio, practiced as a constant and somewhat changing whine, is produced in real-time from sound pieces that Heldén formerly collected. Based on this database, one-minute audio masses are chosen for implementing cross-fade. This makes ambient recording exclusive for every opinion (the Algorithm, *Evolution*, 2014, np). Manuscript will endure change as long as operators retain the screen exposed, without essential teleology, only ongoing addition of Heldén's expressions with those algorithms. A reader can hypothetically hit a fact where Heldén's new expressions have been substituted, where the database would endure to change its formations precisely in the same method as functioned on Heldén's spaces/expressions. Besides being accessible online, effort is signified by a restricted version print book, where all the code is published (Evolution, 2014). The volume also has supplements comprising transitory comments by renowned opponents, including Cayley, Engberg, and Olsson. Cayley appears automatically to be inclined by ever-evolving effort, accepting style changes by repetition with slight differences.

For instance, he proposes, the effort is the addition of Heldén's ground rhythmical natural life, his spoken breath, clear as explicitly signified linguistic idealities, remains from poetic structures. I propose confidential human processes ensuing from Heldén's mind and body and transiting out of him in repetition composing formerly collected them. I may be apprehensive and disturbed because I am concerned theoretically about ontology, the difficulty being of linguistic objects produced by compositional development as to be or not to be competent or delivered by humans possessing a mind and body to understand them. Mind and body" recurrences, ensure "composed/composition," and "never truly be/never be able," but every time in a novel setting, which somewhat changes meaning. When Cayley expresses "concerned," he reflects an essential change in personification between device and human: while the human wants to snooze, eat, and attend the bathroom. The device may endure forever, not possessing a similar thought of mind and body as the authors or audience. Extra Intelligence, of greater procedures than human minds and bodies, can comprise and evoke a surplus of *Sea and Spar Between* and signs toward original balances potential when computational media develop to be a co-author (Leonardo, 2017). In this case,

the idea supporting the object is itself a sequence of infinite processes, transferring, changing, and developing, so the difference between idea and process develops to be blurred, if not overall analyzed.

In this regard, Evolution (Bartz-Beielstein et al, 2014) exposes the influence of literature perceived as an intellectual collection, in which thoughts are circulated between social and practical performers, with data, clarifications, and connotations socializing through the grouping of all instructions, apparent from people into technologies, then external from machines back to humans.

5. Nets of neural

Through many positions, Heldén and Jonson's definition of Evolution is motorized by simulated brainpower. A questioner may answer that algorithms are not gifted. They distinguish nothing about the meanings of work and function by measures found in code comparatively humble (admitting that the methods' arbitrary "kernels" are implemented and suitability standards are established and used here are remote from humble, do not remark code performance strata).

The influence of genetic algorithms originates from outcome practice to include evolutionary undercurrents within a simulated average, which has been established through natural selection. Therefore, the significant part is the more precise narrative of an inherited set of rules as "population-based meta-heuristic optimization algorithms". Whether this amounts to "AI" as an insignificant point.

However, to respond to questions, it measures durable procedures of artificial intelligence, including regular neural nets. Based on the defined "long winter" of AI, when primary potential and interest of the 1950s–1960s appeared to end, bound advancing happened during the growth of neural systems that apply the method of nodes collaborating to imitate synaptic nets in social and animal common sense. Different from previous forms of AI, neural systems are trained to practice recursive subtleties in procedures that do not merely use the productivity of foregoing experiments as a contribution to the following feedback. They additionally alter different "weights" of nodes, resulting in variations in system construction.

This method of knowledge totals contrasts inherited algorithms that practice arbitrary difference aimlessly by preceding findings. Because they depend on Markov chains, they apply findings of earlier repetitions to modify how the web operates. Neural networks used in different AI methods involve machine translation, computer vision, speech recognition, and neural nets. Recurrent neural networks (RNN) are a different type of neural nets where influences amongst parts' methods are fixed diagram together with the structure. This makes them display active sequential performance for time classification. Different from feed-forward neural networks, RNNs have internal retention and can apply it to analyze contributions that are mainly convenient for assignments where the feedback can be unsegmented, such as face recognition and script.

A magnificent specimen of possible neural net architecture is Alpha Go (Baker& Hui, 2017) that lately defeated body Go champions, Sedol (2016) and Jie (2017). Go is more instinctive than chess, captivating more conceivable changes, with a choice

space massively larger than the number of atoms on earth (10^{240} moves vs. 10^7 atoms). These unthinkably excessive, instinctive computational approaches will not operate, but neural nets, employed via consecutive classifications of influences with hidden covering that controls partial impacts, can be examined through elastic and adaptive approaches, much as normal brains acquire.

6. Conclusion

This paper presents the attempts to examine Sea and Spar Between: Coding Dickinson's and Melville's Poetics of Nature and the Divine. The novel is taken as the main study data, which traces the author's testimonial and digital authorship, aligning with the purpose of the study. Nets of neural networks have been generated to classify it measures durable procedures of artificial intelligence, including regular neural nets. However, the expressions in *Sea and Spar Between* are written from Dickinson's poems and Melville's *Moby Dick*. Specific compound words are collected via expressions often applied individually or together. Sea and Spar Between was collected by implementing a simple digital method that allows literary texts' numerical analysis (Digital-poetry, 2017). It is reflected in expressions implemented by one of the authors. I observed specific, simply itemized, distinguishing classes of expressions. The human/equivalent component included cooperatively choosing a few samples of expressions from the writers' lexes and creating a few methods of creating lines. I conducted this relating to my experience and familiarity with distinctive textual measures and linguistic signs of Melville and Dickinson.

Subsequent code expresses the story in detail. The first line implements either shortLine, one NounLine, or a compound CourseLine. Whilst the second line implements rise either AndGoLine, butLine, exclaimLine, or nailedLine. Therefore, modes in particular genres of lines are produced, and modes in organized couplets can be drawn in a JavaScript sequencer that uses *Sea and Spar Between*. A sequencer that comprises collections reserving all lexicons implemented is equally minor and humble. For example, the Sea and Spar Between code, with no explanations, includes fewer fonts than folders that use vector fonts. The purpose of examining such a novel is to keep up with advancements in the field and to enrich comparative poetics, American literature (19th Century), and digital humanities and literary coding, with a reserve for investigating data, refining digital authorship, and allowing scholars to conduct exploration with a diversity of reliable methods that have not been accessible earlier.

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On the Syntactic Derivation of Passive and *by*-Phrases

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Abstract The passive structure, formation, and the status of *by*-phrases in passives have been longstanding topics of debate, receiving substantial attention in syntactic literature. Two primary approaches to these themes have been identified: one based on movement/smuggling, and the other represents a non-movement alternative. This study demonstrates that the non-movement approach holds a distinct advantage over the movement-based account, challenging the broader explanatory coverage claimed by the latter. Specifically, I introduce data from two varieties of Arabic that critically undermine the foundational assumptions of the movement (smuggling) approach, revealing that its predictions are not supported by the observed data. Accordingly, the analysis presented here argues that neither the passive construction with a *by*-phrase nor the short passive (without a *by*-phrase) involves a movement (smuggling) operation. One consequence of the argument advanced in this study is that it casts doubt on the central claim of the movement (smuggling) approach—namely, that the external arguments in passive and active constructions are projected in exactly the same way. In contrast, the non-movement approach, which treats the *by*-phrase as an adjunct, is argued to be an empirically preferred alternative.

Keywords Passive formation • Smuggling • Non-movement approach • *By*-phrases • True arguments • Adjuncts • Modern Standard Arabic • Najdi Arabic

1. Introduction

Passive constructions, such as (1b), have been extensively analyzed in the syntactic literature. A number of approaches have been developed to account for their structure

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and derivation (e.g., Chomsky, 1981; Jaeggli, 1986; Roberts, 1987; Baker, 1988; Åfarli, 1989; Baker, Johnson & Roberts, 1989; Goodall, 1997, 1999; Gehrke & Grillo, 2009; Wanner, 2009; Alexiadou & Doron, 2012; Legate, 2012; Bruening, 2013; Kiparsky, 2013; Alexiadou et al., 2015, 2018; Angelopoulos et al., 2020; Fábregas & Putnam, 2020; Grohmann et al., 2021; Shlonsky, 2024; among many others). In addition to their formation, a central theme in the discussions of the passive construction is the status of the *by*-phrase.

(1) a) Charlie drove the car.

b) The car was driven by Charlie.

Several concepts that have played a central role in the previous analyses of the passive have been abandoned for independent reasons. Nevertheless, two major approaches to the structure and derivation of passive have gained prominence in the recent syntactic literature: the first is a movement-based one, as represented by the smuggling approach (Collins 2005, 2024), and the second is a non-movement approach, which is proposed in several works (Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, and Alexiadou et al. 2015, among many others).

The movement-based approach is most notably represented by the smuggling approach proposed by Collins (2005 and subsequent work) and developed in subsequent work, whereas the non-movement approach has been advanced in several proposals, specifically Bruening (2013), Legate (2014), and Alexiadou et al. (2015). The movement/smuggling approach has attracted renewed attention in recent literature (See Hicks, 2009; Bowers, 2010; Belletti, 2017; Alexiadou et al., 2018; Belletti & Collins, 2021; and the chapters therein; Collins 2024, among many others). Additional constructions have also been analyzed within the same framework. For instance, Belletti (2017) adopts the smuggling approach to derive Romance causatives, and Hicks (2009) offers an analysis of tough-movement constructions using this framework. A founding assumption of the movement analysis is that the external argument is base-generated in the same position and manner in both active sentences and their passive counterparts. Furthermore, according to this approach, a passive is derived through a phrasal Part(iciple)P movement operation, in which a syntactic object—namely, the object DP, is able to move across an intervening element, the *by*-phrase, without violating locality constraints. This is achieved by first moving a larger constituent (the smuggler), which contains the syntactic object to be moved (the smugglee), past the intervening (blocker). Once the larger constituent has moved, the syntactic object (object DP) within the larger constituent (PartP) undergoes movement to the final landing site (Spec, IP). Under the movement/smuggling approach, a *by*-phrase is treated as a syntactically projected true external argument. If the *by*-phrase is not phonetically realized, an implicit argument is proposed. However, according to the non-movement approach (Bruening, 2013, Legate, 2014, Alexiadou et al., 2015), no such movement is assumed. Rather, the derivation of the passive is analyzed as proceeding either through a semantic mechanism or through a combination of syntactic and semantic operations. The *by*-phrase, according to this approach, is an optional adjunct.

In the present study, several phenomena that have been analyzed as evidence in support of the movement/smuggling approach are investigated to determine which approach satisfies the empirical desiderata. Specifically, I present and analyze data drawn from binding, the existence of implicit arguments in short passives, depictive secondary predicates, resultative secondary predicates, the appearance of the theme in a double object construction, the postverbal object DP, and the verbal phrase to the right of the *by*-phrase. It is concluded that the non-movement approach is better able to account for the facts in the passive construction in Modern Standard Arabic (MS Arabic, henceforth) and Central Najdi Arabic (CN Arabic, henceforth), and hence is considered superior to the movement (smuggling) approach. Hence, the analysis presented in this study demonstrates the limitations of the empirical coverage of the smuggling approach. One implication is that the proposal that the *by*-phrase is an optional adjunct is preferable to the proposal that it is a true external argument.

A background about the passive construction in MS Arabic and CN Arabic is in order. Consider the following data from two varieties of Arabic: MS Arabic and CN Arabic.[1] The active sentences are provided in (2a) and (3a), and their passive counterparts are provided in (2b) and (3b), respectively.[2]

(2) MS Arabic

    a) *fasˤsˤal-at*   *l-ladʒnat-u*   *l-ʔaħkaam-a*
       detail.PFV-3SG.F   DET-committee-NOM   DET-rule.PL-ACC
       "The committee detailed the rules."

    b) *fusˤsˤil-at*   *l-ʔaħkaam-u*   *min*   *ladun-i l-ladʒnat-i*
       detail.PFV.PASS-3PL.F   DET-rule.PL-NOM from   part-GEN DET-
       committee-GEN
       "The rules were detailed by the committee."

(3) CN Arabic

    a) *haddad-uw*   *l-mudarrib-ijn*   *l-laaʕib-ijn*
       qiddaam   *baʕadˤ*
       threaten.PFV-3PL.M DET-coach-PL.NOM   DET-player-PL.ACC before
       each other
       "The coaches threatened the players in front of each other."

    b) *hiddad-uw*   *l-laaʕib-ijn*   *min*   (*tˤaraf*)
       l-mudarrib-ijn
       threaten.PFV.PASS-3PL.M DET-player-PL.ACC from (the_part_of)
       DET-coach-PL.GEN
       "The players were threatened by the coaches."

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[1] Throughout the paper, interlinear glosses are provided in accordance with the Leipzig Glossing Rules.
[2] Note that the basic, unmarked, and discourse neutral word order in Modern Standard Arabic is VSO (Peled, 2008: 49; Mohammed, 1999: 1; Saad, 1982: 8ff; among many others). However, other word orders, such as VOS, OVS and SVO are also attested and acceptable; Mohammed (1999) considers the SOV and OSV word orders to be marginal unless a resumptive pronoun is present.

The passive in MS Arabic is formed by changing the vocalic melody of the base verb (see Owens (1984: 180–185) for a detailed description of passive formation in Classical Arabic, and Benmamoun (2000: 26–27), and especially Laks (2013) in MS Arabic; for background on various aspects of the passive construction in that variety, see Saad, 1982 and Hallman, 2002, and the references therein). The vocalic pattern of the base verb changes to *u-i* in the perfective form and *u-a* in the imperfective form. As demonstrated in (2), the vocalic melody of the transitive verb *fasˤsˤala* "detailed" in the active sentence in (2a) is changed to *fusˤsˤila* "were detailed" in the passive sentence in (2b)[3] Additionally, the DP *l-ʔaħkaam* "the rules" is moved in (2b) to the structural subject position from the thematic complement position. The phrase *min laduni lladʒnati* "by the committee" is equivalent to a *by*-phrase in English passive. Similarly, the passive in CN Arabic is formed through vowel alternation within the stem.[4] Thus, the vocalic pattern of the base verb in the perfective form in (3) is changed from *haddad* (CvCcvC)[5] (10a) to *hddad* (CCcVC) (3b)

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of previous analyses of the passive construction in Arabic. Section 3 presents the movement/ smuggling-based approach to the passive construction. An overview of the non-movement approach is provided in Section 4. The status of *by*-phrase within the passive phrase is discussed in Section 5. Section 6 presents and analyzes the relevant data. Section 7 is the conclusion.

2. Previous analyses of the passive construction in Arabic

Although investigations of the passive construction in Arabic (in any variety) from the perspective of the movement/smuggling approach are rare and may even be absent from the literature, with the exception of a very brief discussion in (Ayyat et al. 2013, 2016), there are a few works that have adopted other approaches within the generative[6] tradition to investigate it.

Several attempts have been made in the literature to provide a syntactic analysis of the passive construction in Arabic. Benmamoun (2000: 26f) points out to the assumption that in the perfective and imperfective forms of the Arabic verb, voice is carried by the vocalic melody. He maintains that if that assumption is adopted, then tense cannot be carried by the same morpheme, in this case the vocalic melody, given that voice is a derivational category while tense is an inflectional category. Fassi Fehri (2003), on the other hand, maintains that Arabic is a strong synthetic language with regard to voice and tense. He assumes that passive voice is part of the chain of tense/aspect, not as a separate category or syntactic transformation. Unlike the standard analysis of passive formation in which the theme is assumed to be raised

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[3] See Laks, 2013, for the way the vocalic melody changes when the base verb size exceeds a binary foot, a technicality that does not have any effect on the argument that is advanced in the present study.

[4] For a background about the passive in CN Arabic, the reader is referred to Chapter 7 in Ingham, 1994.

[5] Lower case c means that the relevant sound is geminated.

[6] Non-syntactic and non-generative approaches to the passive construction are beyond the scope of this study.

to Spec, VP, Soltan (2007) contends that the internal argument does not undergo movement in a passive construction in Standard Arabic. He assumes that on a par with post-verbal subjects, the internal argument in its base-generated position in a passive construction is assigned nominative Case and exhibits gender agreement. Thus, he maintains that the passive formation in Standard Arabic is derived as in Figure 1.

In Figure 1, the relation Agree is established between T and the theme DP (the internal argument) *in-situ*, and no movement occurs. In contradiction to Soltan's (2007) analysis, later analyses of the passive construction adopt a movement analysis of the theme DP.

One such analysis is advanced in Ayyat et al. (2013, 2016), who adopt a minimalist approach to the passive construction in Arabic. Ayyat et al. (2013) propose a derivation of the short passive construction in Standard Arabic within the minimalist framework advanced by Chomsky (1995 and later works), while Ayyat et al. (2016) present a similar derivation of agentive passive in Standard Arabic. According to that derivation, the passive infix is the specifier of a Voice head. A probe-goal relation is established between the verb, which enters the derivation with its voice features unvalued, and the Voice head. As a result of this probe-goal relationship, the verb is triggered to raise to the Voice head to check its unvalued voice features and to be attached to the passive infix. Following that step, two subsequent procedures are proposed depending on the word order to be produced. In the case of VS word order, the resulted complex will move to the head of TP in order for the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature to be satisfied. In the SV word order, on the other hand, the complex stays in the Voice head while the theme DP is raised to Spec, TP from Spec, VP to check the EPP feature. Although this analysis of the passive construction in which the theme DP moves is incompatible with Soltan's (2007) account, it remains compatible with Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat (2016). Thus, Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat (2016) propose that in Jordanian Arabic, the post-verbal object NP undergoes a successive-cyclic movement in the passive construction from its original position as the complement of the verb to Spec, VP, in VS word order, and Spec, TP, in SV word
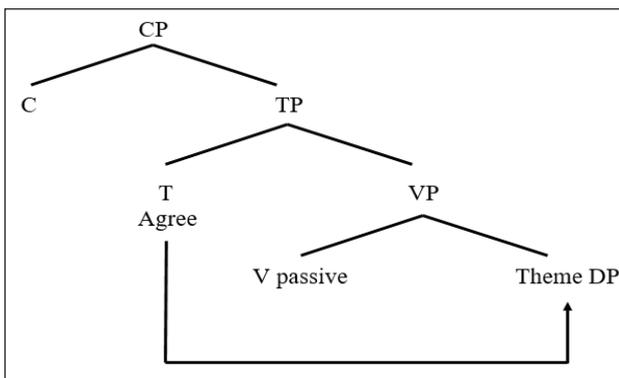
Figure 1. *Soltan's (2007) account of passive formation in Standard Arabic.*

order. This movement is motivated by the checking of Case and phi-features. Thus, Figure 2 represents the derivation of Jordanian Arabic pair of passive sentences, such as those in (4).

(4) Passive in Jordanian Arabic (Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat 2016)

   a) SV word order
   l-masˁaari   *ʔit-saraq-in*
   DET-money   were-stolen-PFM
   "The money was stolen."

   b) VS word order
   ʔit-saraq-in   *l-masˁaari*
   were-stolen-PFM   DET-money
   "The money was stolen."

Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat (2016) argue, as can be seen in Figure 2, that in VS word order (4b) in Jordanian Arabic, the theme DP (complement of V) *l-masˁaari* "the money" raises to Spec, VP from its original position, and that the verb *ʔit-saraq-in* "were stolen" is moved from V to T. In SV word order (4a), they argue that the theme DP (complement of V) *l-masˁaari* "the money" is moved further from its landing site in VS word order to Spec, TP.

Additionally, phase-theoretic (Chomsky 2000 and subsequent work) analyses of the passive construction in Arabic have been proposed in the literature (Al-Shorafat 2018, Ben Ayeche 2018). Al-Shorafat (2018) maintains that the verb is merged with
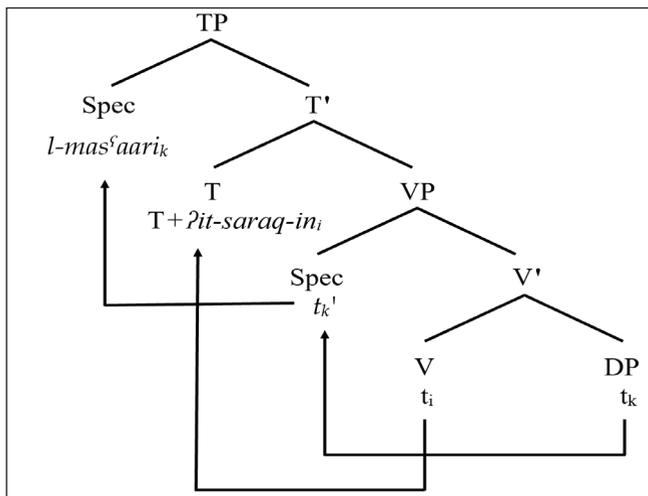
Figure 2. *Passive formation in Jordanian Arabic (Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat 2016). (Reproduced with slight modification from Al-Momani & Al-Qbailat 2016).*

the theme DP, and no Spec of VP is projected. Light v is merged with VP, and a result vP is formed. The verb is raised from V to be adjoined to v, from which the verb acquires its passive vocalic layer. This movement is triggered by the affixal nature of v, which requires it to be attached to a host. The theme DP is moved from its original complement position to Spec,vP, an A-movement operation. On the other hand, Ben Ayeche (2018) argues that in verbal passives in Standard Arabic, there is a voice projection. Additionally, there are two features, [+active] and [−active], which are headed by the voice projection, VoiceP. Adopting a previous distinction between weak phases and strong phases that was first proposed in Chomsky (2000), Ben Ayeche (2018) assumes that Voice [+active] and Voice [−active] are a strong phase and a weak phase, respectively. The external argument is hosted by the strong phase, VoiceP [+active], while the passive morpheme is hosted by the weak phase, VoiceP [−active].

Although those investigations of the passive construction in Arabic have attempted to provide an account of its derivation, none of them has addressed the derivation of this construction from the perspective of the movement/smuggling approach, with the exception of a very brief discussion in (Ayyat et al. 2013, 2016). Ayyat et al. (2013) maintains that Collins's (2005) smuggling approach is a serious violation of Phase Theory (Chomsky 2001, 2005), although no explanation is provided as to support this claim. They, furthermore, point out that the syntactic nature of the smuggling process is not clearly characterized and that the feature which is implicated in triggering the smuggling of vP to VoiceP is not specified. In addition to reiterating the objections against the smuggling approach that are raised in Ayyat et al. (2013), Ayyat et al. (2016) contend that Collins's (2005) smuggling approach is at odds with minimalist principles that disfavor superfluous steps in a derivation. Furthermore, Ayyat et al. (2016) argue that the smuggling approach fails to account for a language, such as Arabic, in which the verb is raised from *V* to *T* via head movement in order for the EPP feature to be satisfied.

Since the treatment of the smuggling approach in the aforementioned studies is relatively brief and lacks detailed argumentation, I will not examine them further here.

3. The movement/smuggling-based approach

An essential claim in the analysis of the passive within Government and Binding Theory/Principles and Parameters Theory is that the position where the external argument of DP *Charlie* is generated in the active sentence (1a) (as the specifier of the Inflectional/Tense Phrase) differs from that where it is generated in the passive counterpart (1b) (as the complement of the preposition *by*) (Jaeggli, 1986; Baker, 1988; Baker et al., 1989; among many others). Collins (2005) argues that this analysis of the passive is problematic owing to the lack of uniformity in how the external theta-role is assigned. In the active sentence (1a), since the external theta role is assigned to a DP in the specifier of IP, whereas in the passive sentence (1b), the DP inside the *by*-phrase receives the external theta role through transmission from the passive morpheme *–en,* which has absorbed that role. Collins contends that this analysis of the passive implies that the relevant theta role is associated

with more than one syntactic configuration, which violates the Uniformity of Theta-Assignment Hypothesis (Baker, 1988; Baker, 1997) and, within the Minimalist Program, the configurational theory of theta-role assignment (Chomsky, 1993, and subsequent work; Hale & Keyser, 1993). The configurational approach to theta-role assignment emerged as a result of the elimination of Deep Structure as a distinct level of representation, and it also questioned the idea of a separate lexicon used to define lexical relationships. According to the configurational theory of theta-role assignment, theta roles are assigned to certain structural configurations. Theta roles are linked to specific syntactic positions (Chomsky, 1993; Chomsky, 1995; Hale & Keyser 1993).

Building on this criticism of how the passive is treated in the Principles and Parameters framework, Collins (2005) proposes a different analysis of the passive, arguing that the underlying position of the external argument in both the active sentence and its passive counterpart is the same. Specifically, he maintains that the external argument is merged in Spec,vP, in both the active and passive states. Since the external argument is in Spec,vP in the passive, the external theta role cannot be absorbed by the passive suffix *en*. To support this hypothesis, Collins offers a derivation of the passive. He introduces several assumptions, including the idea that the passive suffix-*en* and the past participle suffix are similar in that they are incapable of absorbing the theta role or Case. To support this claim, he points to the morphological similarity between the past participle suffix and passive participles in English. This assumption—that the external argument in the passive is merged into Spec,vP—produces the representation in (5).

(5) $[_{IP} [_{DP}$ the car$] [_{I'}$ Infl $[_{VP}$ be $[_{vP} [_{PP}$ by Charlie$] [_{v'}$ v VP$]]]]]$
     (Adapted with slight modification from Collins 2005: 84)

A problematic aspect of this representation is that the word order is incorrect.

(6) *The car was by Charlie driven.

Three possibilities have been suggested for the unacceptability of (6). The first possibility is that the specifier of vP is positioned to the right of the head of v. Nevertheless, this possibility is rejected because it violates established word order patterns in English, where the position of specifiers appears to the left of heads, and it leads to incorrect c-command predictions. The second possibility is that the *by*-phrase is positioned to the right of PartP due to the rightward movement. This option is also unsatisfactory, owing to the assumption that it yields incorrect c-command predictions. The third and final possibility is that the participle driven is moved leftward relative to $[_{PP}$ by Charlie]. However, it remains unclear whether this movement operation is a phrasal or head movement. Assuming that the passive suffix is universally the head of a Voice Phrase VoiceP, it seems probable that the English participle moves by adjoining Voice, the head of VoiceP. According to Collins, under this account, the head of the VP moves first to Part (the head of PartP), then to the head of vP, and eventually adjoins Voice (the head of VoiceP). Alternatively, the movement could involve phrasal movement, where PartP moves directly to the

specifier of VoiceP. Based on evidence drawn from the position of particles in passive constructions where a verb with a particle is passivized, as well as from the pseudo-passive constructions, Collins concludes that the movement type exhibited in the passive is phrasal PartP movement rather than head movement.

Based on all the above-mentioned arguments, Collins proposes that a passive, such as *The car was driven by Charlie*, has the structure represented in Figure 3.

The derivation of the structure in Figure 3 proceeds as follows (For expository convenience, the lower segment of the tree is not represented in its base position, but only in its landing site after movement as Spec,VoiceP): (i) V *drive* is merged with DP1 *the car*, forming VP, (ii) VP is merged with Part, forming Part', (iii) V is raised to Part, (iv) Part' is merged with Spec,Part, forming PartP, (v) PartP is merged with v, forming an intermediate projection, (vi) v' is merged with the external argument to form vP, (vii) Voice is merged with vP and VoiceP is formed, (viii) PartP raises to Spec,Voice, (ix) DP1 is raised to Spec,Part, and subsequently to Spec,I. Additionally, Collins assumes that the participle suffix *–en* does not carry interpretable features; instead, it has uninterpretable features that must be checked, as dictated by the Checking Requirement. He maintains that the assumption that this structure, in which vP dominates PartP, is based on the observation that, in a language such as French, it is impossible for the external argument to agree with a participle. As Kayne (2000) notes, the transitive subject in French never agrees with past participles. According to Collins, VoiceP is a projection headed by a passive suffix. He argues that since this projection exists in Kiswahili, it is reasonable to assume that this phrase is universal. It is worth noting that the standard analysis of the movement of V, as discussed in the literature (in particular, in Hale & Keyser, 1993, Chomsky, 1995, and subsequent
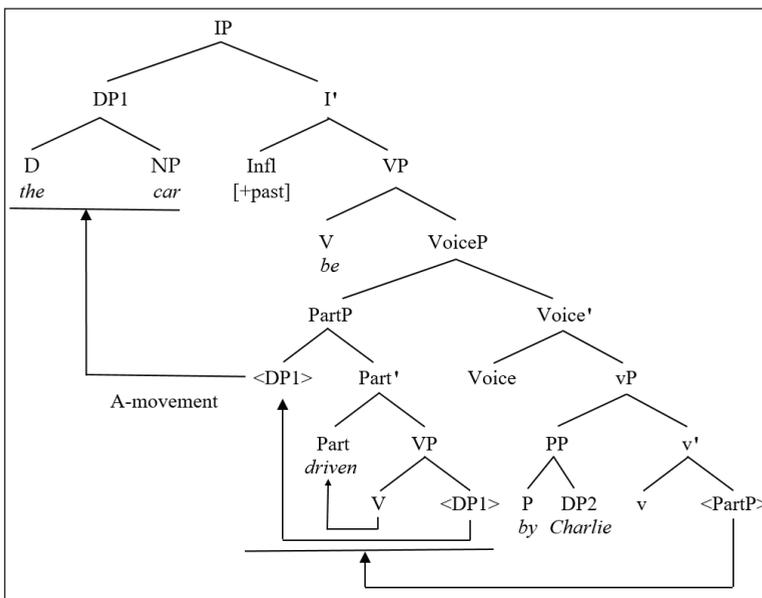
Figure 3. *The smuggling analysis of the passive.*
(Reproduced with slight modification from Collins, 2005).

work), is that it moves to v. Nevertheless, Collins (2005) argues that V does not rise to v, stating that V will only raise to v only if it has not first raised to part.

The approach to the passive construction, which is based on the assumptions outlined above and represented in Figure 3, is called "smuggling" by Collins (2005) and subsequent work. Smuggling is a mechanism used to circumvent locality constraints. Specifically, it explains how a syntactic object can be moved across an intervening element (intervener, phase boundary, or barrier) without violating the locality constraints. Normally, the presence of such an element blocks movement and causes it to appear to violate syntactic conditions—in particular, Relativized Minimality (Rizzi, 1990) and Minimal Link Condition (Chomsky, 2000). A smuggling approach offers a solution to this problem. The solution assumes that a larger constituent containing the syntactic object to be moved first undergoes movement past the intervener. The movement is triggered by the large constituent's need for licensing. Once the larger constituent has moved, the embedded syntactic object can then move to its landing site. In this framework, the larger constituent is the smuggler, the syntactic object to be moved is the smugglee, and the intervener is the blocker.

3. The Non-Movement Approach

Several accounts in the literature argue that the formation of the passive does not involve movement (Bruening 2013; Legate 2014; Alexiadou et al., 2015; among many others).

A major non-movement account of passive formation was proposed by Bruening (2013). According to Bruening (2013), the structure of the passive can be represented by (7).

(7) $[_{PassP}$ Pass $[_{VoiceP}$ Voice $[_{VP}$ V NP]]]

He argues that the passive is realized as a functional head (Pass), which takes an unsaturated VoiceP as its complement; that is, a VoiceP that has not yet introduced its external argument. This implies that a Voice with an unchecked feature is selected by Pass. According to Bruening (2013), when a head Y with an unchecked feature is selected by another head X, the feature is checked by X when it merges with Y. Although Pass syntactically selects an unsaturated Voice projection as its complement, it requires all arguments to be saturated. Consequently, if the external argument of Voice is unsaturated, Pass must saturate it, Pass must saturate it, which is achieved via existential quantification. In addition to syntactic selection, whereby Pass selects a syntactically unsaturated Voice projection, Bruening also maintains that there is another type of selection, which passive formation involves. The second type of selection is semantic: Pass takes an unsaturated function as its argument. Although the external argument is demoted in status, this process does not remove it entirely from the syntactic structure. This rejects the assumption advanced in the literature that passive morphology (such as *-en* in English) absorbs the external argument theta-role. Rather, it remains syntactically accessible and can optionally be expressed using a *by*-phrase.

Legate (2014) synthesizes both the syntactic and semantic analyses of the structure of the passive. Her treatment of the passive supports her argument, based on data drawn from Acehnese (Malayo-Polynesian), that v and Voice are syntactically distinct heads; thus, vP and VoiceP are separate syntactic projections. Legate's (2014) split-VoiceP/vP model differs from the standard analysis of a verbal complex (e.g., Chomsky, 2000, and a subsequent model), which typically consists of a VP headed by a V (a Root) and a light vP that introduces an external argument and functions as a verbalizer. Legate (2014) maintains that while the lower projection vP encodes causative semantics and its head v functions as a verbal categorizer, the higher projection VoiceP is assumed to be associated with several properties. Thus, Voice, as a syntactic head, encodes voice within the clausal structure, assigns accusative and ergative cases, and demarcates a phase-bound syntactic domain. According to Legate's analysis, Voice also introduces the external theta role, which she refers to as an initiator. In contrast, Bruening (2013) argues that syntactic thematic roles are not involved in passive formations. Additionally, Legate (2014) contends that VoiceP can be linked to restricting features, which can be realized on either the head Voice or Spec,VoiceP. Although these restricting features do not saturate the position of the external argument, they impose a semantic restriction. Legate (2014: 90), thus, proposes the representation in Figure 4 for the structure of the passive construction in Acehnese.

Alexiadou et al. (2015) explore the structure and formation of passives from a cross-linguistic perspective. They compared the structure of passivity in English and
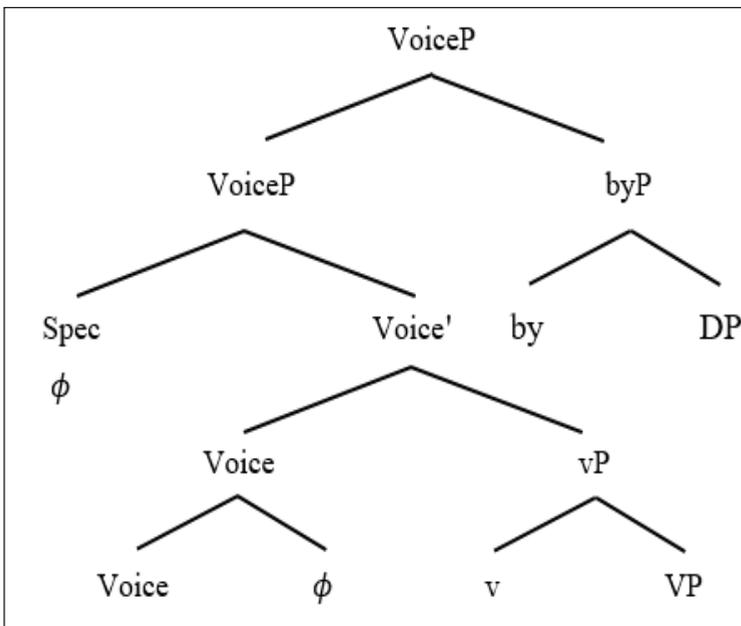
Figure 4. *Legate's (2014) structure of the passive construction. (Reproduced with modification from Legate 2014).*

German, on the one hand, to that in Greek, on the other. Alexiadou et al. (2015) refine Embick's (1998, 2004a, 2004b) assumptions about deriving the passive. Embick argues that the passive is derived in the same way in English and Greek. In both cases, a Voice head is projected with agentive features, but without an external argument. In particular, they proposed that the passive structure in English and German includes the verb's external argument, implying that the input for passivization in these two languages is a transitive structure that contains an external argument. Thus, they argue that passives in English and German contain two projections: VoiceP and PassiveP. The lower projection is VoiceP, where the external argument is introduced by the Voice head; however, the external argument is not assigned a referent by Voice, as Voice lacks a specifier. The VoiceP is selected using a functional Passive head. Conversely, Greek lacks the functional head Passive but has a thematic Voice head that is non-active. The thematic Voice head, which they refer to as Middle Voice and which is also responsible for forming middle constructions, is syntactically intransitive and performs two simultaneous functions: introducing an external argument variable and binding that variable existentially. Alexiadou et al. (2015) note that languages differ in terms of whether they are Passive only, Passive and Middle, or Middle only.

In the following section, I present the various accounts advanced by both movement-based and non-movement-based analyses of passive formations examined in the present study.

4. The Status of *By*-Phrases in Passives

Two major proposals have been made in the literature regarding the status of *by*-phrase in the passive. The first proposal argues that a *by*-phrase in the passive is an adjunct. One notable version of this view is presented by Bruening (2013), who argues that a *by*-phrase is an optional modifier rather than an obligatory argument. Similarly, Legate (2014) maintains that *by*-phrases are not core arguments; rather, they are adjuncts to VoiceP, a projection higher than vP. According to another proposal (Alexiadou et al. 2015), this *by*-phrase can be considered an argument. Thus, Alexiadou et al. (2015) contend that the *by*-phrase is not an adjunct, but a morphological realization of the external argument introduced by the head Voice. Furthermore, Collins (2005; 2024) maintains, drawing on evidence from Binding Theory, that *by*-phrases in passives are arguments rather than adjuncts. Collins (2024) goes further, stating that adjuncts do not exist in syntax.

4.1 The *by*-phrase as an adjunct

Bruening (2013) argues that *by*-phrases function as adjuncts, but they carry a c(ategory)-selectional feature that requires them to merge with an unsaturated Voice projection. He contends that not only by-phrases require the category of Voice, but instrumentals and comitatives do as well. That is, a *by*-phrase strictly selects the syntactic category of the phrase it merges with. The syntactic category selected by the *by*-phrase assigns the initiator role; thus, the argument of the *by*-phrase is assigned

the initiator theta role. The derivation of the *by*-phrase structure in passive proceeds as follows: The *by*-phrase first merges with an internal argument (its complement); then, as an adjunct, it merges with the second argument (unsaturated Voice). The second argument, rather than being an adjunct, projects. As a result, the selectional feature of Voice projects rather than that of the *by*-phrase. Merging an adjunct with a category does not result in checking the features of that category; rather, the features of the adjunct are checked. Pass complements the tree, the root node of which is a higher Voice projection. According to Bruening (2013: 25), the structure of the passive with a *by*-phrase is illustrated in Figure 5. Note that according to the standard analysis of the verbal complex (e.g., Chomsky, 2000, and subsequent work), VP is dominated by light vP.

Bruening (2013) maintains that *by*-phrases follow the same pattern as two distinct types of adjuncts: instrumental adjuncts and comitatives oriented toward external arguments. Specifically, he argues that all these types of adjuncts attach to a Voice projection. He contends that *by*-phrases, instrumentals, and comitatives do not appear with unaccusatives, sporadic advancements (see Marantz 1984: 145ff for a discussion of this phenomenon), or middles, because those structures lack Voice. Conversely, a *by*-phrase can appear with nominals that are not definitely verb-derived. Bruening concluded that these two facts suggest that *by*-phrases occur only in passive constructions within the sentential domain and that, in passives, they possess distinct properties which set them apart from *by*-phrases occurring elsewhere. Furthermore, he assumed that *by*-phrases are similar to instrumentals and comitatives in two additional aspects: all are acceptable in various environments and unacceptable with the same types of VPs. In light of these similarities, he concluded that the presence of an external argument is required by *by*-phrases, instrumentals, and comitatives. It is not the *by*-phrase that introduces the external argument; rather, the by-phrase
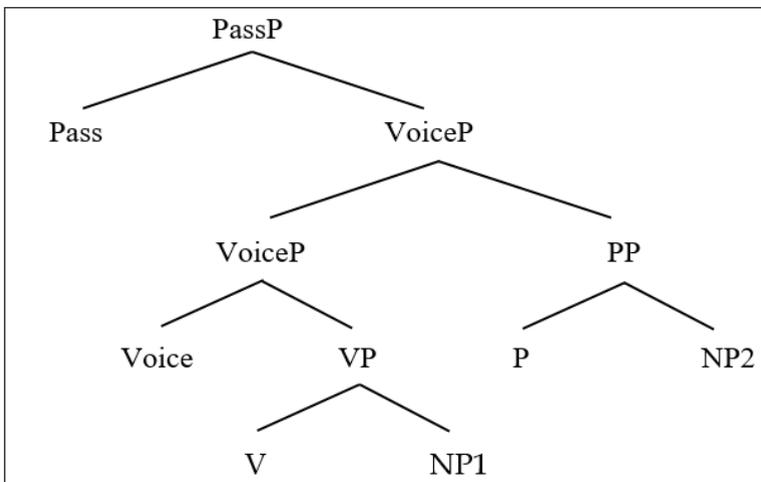
Figure 5. *Passive structure according to Bruening (2013).*
[Adapted with slight modification from Bruening (2013: 25)].

occupies the role already present. Therefore, external arguments must be present for *by*-phrases to realize them. The realization of these arguments through *by*-phrases is considered a possible alternative. Based on these assumptions, he concludes that there is no special syntactic relationship between *by*-phrases and external arguments.

Legate (2014) states that *by*-phrases in passives constructions of languages with voice alternations function as adjuncts and not core arguments. Note that Kratzer (1996) assumes that VoiceP is universally required to introduce external arguments; nevertheless, Legate (2014) maintains that external arguments can be licensed via vP alone—that is, without the need for VoiceP. She argues that VoiceP is active only in languages that exhibit morphological voice alternations or syntactic voice operations; thus, it is not universal. Legate (2014) argues that the evidence supporting the claim that *by*-phrases are adjuncts includes their general optionality (although she noted that *by*-phrases are obligatory in some languages, such as Greek), their syntactic behavior as modifiers, and the absence of properties, such as control and binding, typically associated with true arguments. The fact that languages without VoiceP entirely lack *by*-phrases supports the view that these are VoiceP-dependent adjuncts. Legate also assumes, as explained above, that VoiceP may be associated with restricting phi-features. They may appear at the head of VoiceP or in its specifier. The phi-features of the Voice semantically restrict the external theta role, referred to as the initiator, which is introduced in this configuration. The DP complement in *by*-phrase receives the initiator theta role from *by*. Note that in her analysis, by-phrases in languages such as English are not syntactically assigned the initiator theta role by VoiceP or vP. Rather, Voice serves to semantically link the initiator theta role to the clause. Existential closure is applied so that this external argument position receives a semantic interpretation, which is an existential interpretation in this case.

4.2 The *by*-phrase as an argument

Alexiadou et al. (2015) propose the concept of licensing of *by*-phrases. They state that Voice projection, which introduces the external argument, is licensed by *by*-phrases. The licensing is comparable to the external argument of its active counterpart. They explain that the assumption that no theta-role is assigned by the preposition *by* in the passive is based on evidence drawn from two phenomena. The first is that the post-verbal DP's theta role in the passive varies with the verb; hence, the preposition *by* is assumed to be a dummy (Collins, 2005). The second phenomenon is that external argument DPs in transitive sentences and *by*-phrases are equivalent in terms of interpretation. They reference proposals (such as Roberts, 1987; Bruening, 2013) claiming that the same compositional mechanism used to interpret external arguments in active sentences also applies to the *by*-phrases in passives. Consequently, they concluded that the *by*-phrase implies the existence of a VoiceP, through which the external argument is introduced. Thus, they view the *by*-phrase not an adjunct, but rather, a morphological realization of the external argument introduced by the head Voice.

Based on these two phenomena, Collins (2005) maintains that the preposition *by* in such structures functions as a dummy preposition, contributing no semantic meaning, and consisting solely of uninterpretable features. Furthermore, he argues that the preposition *by* in the passive occupies the head of the Passive projection

and that it and its DP complement do not form a single constituent. He contends that the preposition by in the *by*-phrase is analogous to the complementizer for in C. Nevertheless, Bowers (2010: 51f) criticizes this proposal, arguing that there is a critical distinction between by and for, which undermines the assumption that by is merely a passive voice grammatical marker. He maintains that *by*, unlike *for*, imposes restrictions on the constituent that follows it; for instance, *by* cannot be followed by idiom chunks or expletives. This observation led him to conclude that *by* assigns a theta-role to its argument. Collins (2005) maintains that the original position in which the DP introduced by the *by*-phrase is generated is the same position occupied by the DP external argument in the corresponding active.

Collins (2024) rejects arguments that advocate treating the *by*-phrase in the passive as an adjunct [e.g., those advanced by Bruening (2013) and Legate (2014)]. More broadly, he assumes that adjuncts do not exist in syntax, adopting a feature of Chomsky's (2004) system, where (Set) Merge is responsible for argument structure, while Pair-Merge is responsible for predicate composition. Collins (2024) argues that treating the *by*-phrase as adjoined via Pair-Merge to vP is problematic, as it fails to produce the correct c-command facts. He claims that the *by*-phrases behavior shows a stark contrast to that of adjuncts in relation to binding phenomena. Thus, based on evidence drawn from the Binding Theory, he contends that *by*-phrases in passives are arguments rather than adjuncts. Therefore, he formulates the two assumptions in (8) and (9) as the basis of his argument.

(8) The external argument of the passive is projected in exactly the same manner as the external argument of the active. (Collins, 2024: 1; ex. 3)

(9) The implicit argument in the passive is syntactically projected. (Collins, 2024: 3; ex. 7)

He maintains that these two assumptions were derived from the two UG principles given in (10) and (11).

(10) Argument criterion (AC) (Collins, 2024: 5; ex. 10)

   a) Each argument is introduced by a single argument-introducing head.
   b) Each argument-introducing head introduces a single argument.

(11) Theta-criterion (TC) (Collins, 2024: 5; ex. 12; based on Chomsky, 1986: 97)

Each argument α appears in a chain containing a unique visible theta-position P, and each theta-position P is visible in a chain containing a unique argument α.

The two assumptions in (8) and (9) challenge the stance advocated by Bruening (2013), Legate (2014), and Alexiadou et al. (2015). Furthermore, Collins (2024) argues that the proposal, which treats *by*-phrases as adjuncts is incompatible with two UG principles: The AC (10) and the TC (11). He states that for a head to obey the AC/TC, it must have an argument-introducing property.

In the following section, I present data from MS Arabic and CN Arabic that appear to be counterexamples to the smuggling approach and the assumption that passive *by*-phrases are arguments.

5. Data and analysis

In this section, I examine the evidence provided by Collins (2005) in proposing a smuggling analysis of the passive. Consider the English sentence in (12):

(12) *John wrote the book.

Collins (2005) maintains that the sentence in (11) is ill-formed because the object DP *the book* has to move past an intervener, *by John*, to SpecIP. This A-movement violates locality constraints, in particular, the Minimal Link Condition (Chomsky, 2000) and Relativized Minimality (Rizzi, 1990). If the entire PartP, including the object DP, had moved past the *in-situ* subject to Spec,IP, the sentence would have been acceptable. Now, consider the MS Arabic sentences in (13) and CN Arabic sentences in (14).

(13) MS Arabic

   a) *sarraħ-a*   *l-dʒajʃ-u*   *l-dʒunuwd-a*
   discharge.PFV-3SG.M   DET-army-NOM   DET-soldier.PL-ACC
   "The army discharged the soldiers."

   b) *surriħ-a*   *l-dʒunuwd-u*   *min*   *qibal-i*   *l-dʒajʃ-i*
   discharge.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-soldier.PL-NOM from   part-GEN   DET-army-GEN
   "The soldiers were discharged by the army."

   c) *surriħ-a*   *min*   *qibal-i*   *l-dʒajʃ-i*   *l-dʒunuwd-u*
   discharge.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   from   part-GEN DET-army-GEN DET-soldier.PL-NOM
   "The soldiers were discharged by the army."

(14) CN Arabic

   a) *ħarradˤ-uw*   *l-mudrris-ijn*   *tˤ-tˤullaab*
   pit.PFV-3PL.M   DET-teacher-PL.NOM   DET-student.PL.ACC
   "The teachers pitted the students."

   b) *ħirdˤ-uw*   *tˤ-tˤullaab*   *min*   *l-mudrris-ijn*
   pit.PFV.PASS-3PL.M   DET-student.PL.NOM from   DET-teacher-PL.GEN
   "The students were pitted by the teachers."

   c) *ħirdˤ-uw*   *min*   *l-mudrris-ijn*   *tˤ-tˤullaab*
   pit.PFV.PASS-3PL.M   from   DET-teacher-PL.GEN DET-student.PL.NOM
   "The students were pitted by the teachers."

As illustrated in the MS Arabic sentences in (13) and their CN Arabic counterparts in (14), the object DPs in the passive sentences appear to the right of the *by*-phrase. Thus, the object DP *ldʒunuwd* "the soldiers" in the MS Arabic passive sentence in (13c) appears to the right of the *by*-phrase *min qibali ldʒajʃi* "by the army." The same pattern is observed in the CN Arabic passive sentence in (14c), although it is only

marginally acceptable. In (14c), the object DP *t'ť'ullaab* "the students" follows the *by*-phrase *min lmudrrisijn* "by the teachers." If we adopt the smuggling approach advanced by Collins (2005), we must assume that PartP has moved past the external argument and left the object DP behind. Nevertheless, this assumption negates the essential rationale for the smuggling analysis. The smuggling operation is meant to smuggle the object DP past the intervener, so leaving it behind runs counter very essence of the smuggling approach.

Further support for this pattern, where elements of the passive construction can occur after the *by*-phrase, can be drawn from other structures. One such example of this structure is the negative construction.

(15) *lam   junʃar   min   qibal-i   l-muraasil-i   l-xabar-u*
     NEG   publish.IMP.3SGM.PASS   from   part-GEN   DET-reporter-GEN
     DET-story-NOM
     "The story was not published by the reporter."

The MS Arabic negative sentence in (15) exhibits the same pattern as that explained above. Thus, as demonstrated in (15), the object DP *lxabar* "the story" appears after the *by*-phrase *min qibali lmuraasil* "by the reporter." The acceptability of (13c), (14c), and (15) constitutes a problem with the smuggling approach.

Not only can the object DP occur to the right of the *by*-phrase in MS and CN Arabic, but also in the verbal phrase.

(16) MS Arabic

    a) *kaan-a   l-dʒunuwd-u   min   qibal-i   l-dʒajʃ-i*
       be.PFV-3SG.M   DET-soldier.PL-NOM   from   part-GEN   DET-army-GEN
       qad   surriħ-uw
       EMPH   discharge.PFV.PASS-3PL.M
       "The soldiers were indeed discharged by the army."

    b) *kaan-at   l-ʔaħkaam-u   min   ladun-i   l-ladʒnat-i*
       be.PFV-3SG.F   DET-rule.PL-NOM   from   part-GEN   DET-committee-GEN
       qad   fusˤsˤil-at
       EMPH   detail.PFV.PASS-3PL.F
       "The rules were indeed detailed by the committee."

(17) CN Arabic
    taraa   l-ʕummaal   min   tˤaraf   l-miʃrif-ijn
    EMPH   DET-worker.PL.NOM   from   part   DET-supervisor-PL.GEN
    qid   bilɣ-aw
    EMPH   inform.PFV.PASS-3PL.M
    "The workers were indeed informed by the supervisors."

Based on Collins's (2005) assumption that the object DP originates in PartP, it can be argued that PartP has not moved to Spec,VoiceP; only the object DP did. Thus, we can conclude that the smuggling approach is not supported by the data in (13)–(17).

5.1 *By*-phrases as (external) arguments

In this section, I discuss the pieces of evidence advanced in support of treating *by*-phrases as arguments. The primary argument in this regard is drawn from binding. Collins (2005) provides the following passive sentences to support this argument:

(18) a) The magazines were sent by Mary to herself.
      b) Testimony was given by the suspect about himself.
          Collins (2005)

In both sentences in (18), the reflexive is bound by the external argument in the *by*-phrase, which corroborates the idea that the external argument c-commands the reflexive. Furthermore, Collins, (2024) provides data from English that show a difference in acceptability between passive *by*-phrases and adjuncts.

(19) a) The packages were then sent to each other by the children.
          Collins, (2024)
      b) *The packages were sent for the children to each other.

(20) a) The packages were sent by the children to themselves.
          Collins, (2024)

      b) *The packages were sent for the children to themselves.

Based on the data in (18)–(20), he contends that there is a difference regarding the binding of anaphors between the DP of the *by*-phrase in a passive structure and the DP of an adjunct PP, whereas the former can bind an anaphor (a reflexive or reciprocal) that follows it in the same clause (18a,b, 19a, 20a), while the latter cannot (19b, 20b)

Compare the English passive with the following data from MS Arabic in (21) and CN Arabic in (22):

(21) MS Arabic

    a) ?? *?ursil-at*   *l-madʒallaat-u*   *min* *qibal-i*   *l-fataat-i*
        send.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-magazine.PL-NOM from part-GEN   DET-girl-GEN
        ?ilaa *nafsi-haa*
        to   self-her
        "The magazines were sent by the girl to herself."

    b) ?? *?udlija*   *bi-ʃ-ʃahaadat-i*   *min* *qibal-i*
        give.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   with-DET-testimony-GEN   from part-Gen
        l-muttaham-i   *ʕan*   *nafsi-hi*
        DET-suspect-GEN   about   self-him
        'Testimony was given by the suspect about himself.'

c) *ʔursil-at   tˤ-tˤuruwd-u   min   ʔadʒl-i   l-ʔatˤfaal-i
   send.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-package.PL-NOM from   for-GEN   DET-child.
   PL-GEN
   ʔilaa   ʔanfusi-him
   to   self.PL-them
   'The packages were sent for the children to themselves.'

d) ?? rusim-at   l-lawħaat-u   min   qibal-i   r-rassaam-ijna
   paint.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-painting.PL-NOM   from   part-GEN
   DET-artis-PL.GEN
   l-ʔanfusi-him
   for-self.PL-them
   'The paintings were painted by the artists for themselves.'

e) *rusim-at   l-lawħaat-u   min   ʔadʒl-i   r-rassaam-ijna
   paint.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-painting.PL-NOM from   for-GEN   DET-
   artists-PL.GEN
   l-ʔanfusi-him
   for-self.PL-them
   'The paintings were painted for the artists for themselves.'

(22) CN Arabic

a) ?? ʔirsl-at   l-xitˤaab-aat   min   l-mudir-ijn   l-nfis-hum
   send.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-letter-PL   from   DET-manager-PL to-
   self.PL-them
   'The letters were sent by the managers to themselves.'

b) *ʔirsl-at   l-xitˤaab-aat   ʕalaʃaan l-mudir-ijn   l-nfishum
   send.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-letter-PL   for   DET-manager-PL
   to-self.PL-them
   'The letters were sent for the managers to each other.'

All the sentences in (21) and (22) are questionable at best and sound unnatural. This is due to a violation of the Binding principle. Thus, in the MS Arabic sentences in (21), it seems that the reflexive cannot be bound by the antecedent within the clause, which accounts for the unacceptability of these sentences. The same reasoning applies to the CN Arabic sentences in (22). Those binding facts provide evidence against treating the DP in the *by*-phase as an external argument rather than an adjunct.

Further support for the conclusion drawn from the binding facts in (21) and (22) is provided by the pattern in the MS Arabic sentence in (23).

(23) ħurridˤ-a   l-dʒunuwd-u$_i$ min   qibal-i
     incite.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-soldier.PL-NOM   from   part-GEN
     l-qaadat-i$_j$ ʕalaa   baʕdˤi-him   baʕdˤaa i/??$_j$
     DET-commander.PL-GEN   on   each-them   other
     'The soldiers were incited by the officers against each other.'

When both the object DP (the *in-situ* subject) and the external argument (in the *by*-phrase) are potential antecedents of the anaphor, the object DP is unambiguously interpreted as the antecedent. This is exemplified by the sentence in (23), in which, although the external argument (in the *by*-phrase) *lqaadati* "the commanders" is closer to the reciprocal *baʕdʕihim baʕdʕaa* "each other," that reciprocal is bound by the object DP (the *in-situ* subject) *ldʒunuwdu* "the soldiers" rather than the external argument. Since the external argument is closer to the anaphor than the object DP, it is expected that the external argument should bind the reciprocal, given the assumption that both c-command it. However, the other DP–that is, the structural subject—turns out to be the antecedent, contradicting the predictions of the smuggling approach.

In the following section, I discuss whether there is a need to move PartP in passive constructions without *by*-phrases.

5.2 Short passives

Collins (2005) notes that in short passives, that is, those without *by*-phrases, an external argument is structurally present, although it is phonetically null. This observation is based on the binding and licensing patterns in English. Two of these patterns are the ability of an implicit argument to bind a reflexive and that a depictive secondary predicate can be licensed by an implicit argument. Collins provides examples of these two patterns in English and assumes that the structure of a short passive is as in (24).

(24) $[_{IP} [_{DP1}] [_{I'} I [_{VoiceP} [_{PartP} Part [_{VP} V <DP1>]] [_{Voice'} Voice [_{vP} DP2 e$
$[_{v'} v <PartP>]]]]]]$

The derivation in (24)[7] is identical to the derivation in Figure 3, except for the element that occupies Spec,vP; the element in Figure 3 is a *by*-phrase, while in (24), it is an empty category DP. Thus, the Voice is spelled out in two ways: either via *by* (with overt DP) or via a null spell-out in short passives. The core operation in both derivations is the movement of PartP to Spec,VoiceP.

Nevertheless, consider the MS Arabic sentences in (25) and (26).

(25) a) *haaðihi l-imtijjaaz-aat-i janbaɣi ʔan juħtafaðʕa
such DET-privilege-PL-GEN should that keep.IMP.PASS.JUS
bi-haa li-nafsi-hi/li-n-nafs-i
with-it for-self-him/for-DET-self-GEN
'Such privileges should be kept to oneself.'

Based on English examples in Baker et al. (1989) as cited by Collins (2005),

b) *ʔaʃ-ʃahaadat-u l-mudʕirrat-u judlaa bi-haa
DET-testimony-NOM DET-damaging-NOM give.IMP.PASS with-it
daaʔiman ħawla nafsi-hi/n-nafs-i fij l-muħaakamaat-i
s-sirrijijat-i
always about self-him.GEN/DET-self-GEN in DET-trial.PL-GEN

---

[7] *e* represents an empty category.

DET-secret-GEN
'Damaging testimony is always given about oneself in secret trials.'

Based on English examples in Roberts (1987), as cited by Collins (2005):

(26) a) *kutib-a   l-kitaab-u   maxmuwr-an
        write.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-book-NOM   drunk-ACC
        'The book was written drunk.'

Based on English examples in Baker (1988), as cited by Collins (2005):

     b) *juʔkalu   l-fatˤuwr-u   ˤaadat-an   ˤaarij-an
        give.IMP.PASS.3SG.M   DET-breakfast-NOM   usually-ACC   nude-ACC
        fij   n-naaħijt-i
        at   DET-commune-GEN
        'At the commune, breakfast is usually eaten nude.'

Based on English examples in Baker (1988), as cited by Collins (2005):

     c) *janbaɣi   ʔllaa   tuɣanna   haaðihi   l-ʔuɣnijat-u   maxmuwr-an
        must   not   sing.IMP.PASS.3SG.F   this   DET-song-NOM   drunk-ACC
        'This song must not be sung drunk.'

Based on English examples in Baker (1988), as cited by Collins (2005):
The patterns predicted by the smuggling approach to be well-formed are unacceptable. Specifically, the prediction that an implicit argument is present in passive form without a *by*-phrase and that this implicit argument can bind a reflexive is not borne out, as shown in (25). Furthermore, as indicated in (26), a depictive secondary predicate is not licensed passively without a *by*-phrase. These facts counter the structural presence of implicit arguments in the passives. Therefore, if no implicit argument is syntactically present, there is no basis for assuming that object DP is smuggled by PartP over that implicit argument. The same structures were unacceptable in CN Arabic. Consider, for instance, the CN Arabic sentence in (27).

(27) a) *haa   l-imtijjaaz-aat   laazim   jiħtafaðˤ   b-haa
        such   DET-privilege-PL.GEN   should   keep.IMP.PASS.JUS   with-it
        l-nafsi-h/l-n-nafs
        for-self-him/for-DET-self.GEN
        'Such privileges should be kept to oneself.'

     b) *kitb   l-kitaab   maxmuwr
        write.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-book.NOM   drunk.ACC
        'The book was written drunk.'

The unacceptability of the CN Arabic sentence in (27a) calls into question the argument advanced in the smuggling approach that there is an implicit argument and that the reflexive is bound by that argument. Furthermore, the CN Arabic sentence in (27b) is ungrammatical and, hence, challenges the claim of the smuggling approach

that an implicit argument exists in a passive construction without a by-phrase and that this implicit argument licenses the depictive secondary predicate.

5.3 What can occur after the external argument

A major question addressed by Collins (2005) is which types of elements in English can occur after the external argument in a passive construction, in contrast to stranded prepositions (in pseudo-passives) and particles that cannot follow the external argument in such a construction. He discusses resultative secondary predicates and the theme of the double-object construction. With regard to resultative secondary predicates, it is shown that they are banned from following the external argument, which is taken as evidence that these resultative secondary predicates are not extracted from PartP and that the only way to rescue such a structure is to pied-pipe them with PartP. The other element investigated in relation to its ability to occur after the external argument in the passive is the theme (the second object) of a double-object construction, which behaves similarly to resultative secondary objects. The inability of the theme in a Double Object Construction (DOC henceforth) to follow an external argument is attributed to the assumption that the only available derivation for such a structure is to move the DOC second object DP past the goal DP in the Specifier of Applicative Phrase (ApplP). Nevertheless, Collins *op. cit.* observes that CPs, IPs, and PPs are allowed to appear to the right of the external argument in passive English. He analyzed such a pattern as a result of a remnant movement operation whereby the rightward constituent, for example, PP, is moved, and then Part P (=the remnant) is moved afterwards. The outcome of this remnant movement is that constituent PP appear after an external argument. In what follows, I consider whether the abovementioned syntactic objects can follow the external argument in passive MS Arabic.

(28) a) **musiħ-at   tˤ-tˤaawilat-u   naðˤijfat-an   min   qibal-i*
     wipe.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-table-NOM   clean-ACC   from
     part-GEN
     l-ʕaamil-i
     DET-worker-GEN
     'The table was wiped clean by the worker.'

    b) **musiħ-at   tˤ-tˤaawilat-u   min qibal-i l-ʕaamil-i*
     wipe.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-table-NOM   from part-GEN DET-worker-GEN
     naðˤijfat-an
     clean-ACC
     'The table was wiped clean by the worker.'

(29) a) **tˤuriq-a   l-maʕdan-u   mustawij-an   min   qibal-i*
     hammer.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-metal-NOM   flat-ACC   from   part-GEN
     l-ʕaamil-i
     DET-worker-GEN
     'The metal was hammered by the worker.'

b) *tˤuriq-a   l-maʕdan-u   min   qibal-i   l-ʕaamil-i
hammer.PFV.PASS-3SG.M   DET-metal-NOM   from   part-GEN   DET-
worker-GEN
mustawij-an
flat-ACC
'The metal was hammered by the worker.'

Resultative secondary predicates, whether following or preceding the *by*-phrase, are unacceptable in MS Arabic. Thus, in (28a), the resultative secondary predicate *naðˤijfatan* "clean" precedes the *by*-phrase *min qibali lʕaamili* "by the worker," while in (28b), the resultative secondary predicate *naðˤijfatan* "clean" follows the *by*-phrase *min qibali lʕaamili* "by the worker." Similarly, in (29a), the resultative secondary predicate *mustawijan* "flat" precedes the *by*-phrase *min qibali lʕaamili* "by the worker," while in (29b), the resultative secondary predicate *mustawijan* "flat" follows the *by*-phrase *min qibali lʕaamili* "by the worker." Collins suggests that the reason resultative Adjective Phrases cannot follow the external argument is because they must be pied-piped with PartP rather than extracted from PartP. However, his assumption fails to support the pairs in (28) and (29). Specifically, the resultative secondary predicate *naðˤijfatan* "clean" in (28) is allowed to occur neither before nor after the external argument. The same judgment applies to the resultative secondary predicate *mustawijan* "flat" in (29). I contend that an explanation for the fact that resultative secondary predicates are not allowed before and after the external argument is that the structure does not exist in MS Arabic. In other words, resultative secondary predicates are not acceptable in active sentences in MS Arabic. An alternative structure that can be investigated in this regard is the noun phrase secondary predicate.

(30) a) *ʔuxtijr-at*   l-fataat-u   rʔijsat-an   min   ladun-i
choose.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-girl-NOM   chair-ACC   from   part-GEN
l-ladʒnat-i
DET-committee-GEN
'The girl was chosen a chair.'

b) *ʔuxtijr-at*   l-fataat-u   min   ladun-i   l-ladʒnat-i
choose.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-girl-NOM   from   part-GEN DET-committee-GEN
rʔijsat-an
chair-ACC
'The girl was chosen a chair.'

A noun-phrase secondary predicate can appear after a *by*-phrase in the passive in MS Arabic, as seen in (30b) In addition to secondary predicates, the position of the theme in a DOC relative to the *by*-phrase in a passive constitutes has also been examined to determine which syntactic objects can appear after the *by*-phrase in a passive structure.

(31) a) *ʔuʃtˤij-at*   *l-fataat-u*   *l-kitaab-a*   *min*   *ladun-i*
        give.PFV.PASS-3SG.F   DET-girl-NOM   DET-book-ACC   from   part-GEN
        r-radʒul-i
        DET-man-GEN
        "The girl was given the book by the man."

   b) *ʔuʃtˤij-at*   *l-fataat-u*   *min*   *ladun-i*   *r-radʒul-i*
        give-3SF.Pf.Pass   DET-girl-NOM   from   part-GEN   DET-man-GEN
        l-kitaab-a
        DET-book-ACC
        "The girl was given the book by the man."

The pattern exhibited by the structure in (31b) demonstrates that the second object in the DOC appears after the *by*-phrase. The sentence in (31b) is predicted, contrary to the fact, that it is ill-formed in Collins's approach to movement. Since the English counterpart of (31b) is ill-formed, he maintains that the only way for that structure to be derived in English is by moving the DOC second object past the Goal DP in Spec,ApplP. As the structure in (31) indicates, it cannot be assumed that the extraction of theme DP from a position lower than the goal DP in Spec,ApplP is permitted.

To summarize, the data presented and analyzed above indicate that the non-movement approach to passive formation is superior to the movement (smuggling) approach. Specifically, the key predictions of the movement approach are not supported by the MS Arabic and CN Arabic data discussed earlier. Thus, the movement approach predicts that the postverbal object DP in the passive should not appear to the right of the *by*-phrase. However, this prediction is not borne out, as indicated by the MS Arabic example in (13c) and the CN Arabic example in (14c) The ability of the postverbal object DP to occur after the *by*-phrase suggests that DP has not moved across the external argument as an element of PartP, which contradicts the smuggling analysis. The same reasoning applies to the negative form of the passive sentence, as demonstrated in (15). In addition to the postverbal object DP, verbal phrases can also appear after the *by*-phrase, as shown in (16) and (17). The non-movement approach, which treats the *by*-phrase as an adjunct, correctly accounts for the possibility of certain elements of the passive appearing to its right.

Another phenomenon that has been analyzed in relation to passive formation and the status of *by*-phrases is binding. Based on binding data from English, the movement (smuggling) analysis argues that external arguments—that is, DPs in *by*-phrases, can bind reflexives; hence, it is assumed that those external arguments c-command the reflexives. Furthermore, it is maintained that in English, DPs within adjuncts, unlike *by*-phrases in passives, cannot bind reflexives that follow them in the same clause. Nevertheless, I argue that Collins's (2005, 2024) reflexive-binding examples are problematic.

Additionally, the equivalent reflexive-binding examples in MS Arabic are minimally unnatural. It has also been claimed that when the object DP (the *in-situ* subject) and the DP in the *by*-phrase are potential antecedents for the anaphor, the object DP is unambiguously interpreted as an antecedent. Thus, in (23), there are two potential antecedents for the reciprocal   *baʕdˤihim*   *baʕdˤaa* "each other": object

DP (the *in-situ* subject) and the external argument (in the *by*-phrase). Although the external argument (in the *by*-phrase) *lqaadati* "the commanders" is closer to the reciprocal *baʕdˤihim baʕdˤaa* "each other," the object DP is unambiguously interpreted as the antecedent. The fact that the DP in the *by*-phrase is closer to the anaphor and that the DP is still unable to bind it suggests that the movement (smuggling) approach fails to account for this pattern. In contrast, these binding facts can be more easily explained under the non-movement approach, which treats the *by*-phrase as an adjunct.

Consistent with the treatment of passives with *by*-phrases as containing an external argument, the movement/smuggling approach argues that short passives, that is, passives without *by*-phrases, contain an implicit argument that is syntactically projected but phonetically null. Consequently, the movement approach holds that this syntactically presented external argument should be able to bind reflexives within the same clause. Nonetheless, data from MS Arabic contradict this prediction.

In addition, depictive secondary predicates are not allowed in the short passive, which refutes the presence of an implicit argument in this passive type. The ungrammaticality of a passive construction in English where a resultative secondary predicate follows the *by*-phrase is explained by Collins (2005) as due to the failure to move the resultative predicate through pied-piping as part of PartP. However, in MS Arabic, resultative secondary predicates are prohibited from appearing either before or after the *by*-phrase. This pattern can be explained by the assumption that resultative secondary predicates are not permitted in active sentences in MS Arabic. Hence, the inability of resultative secondary predicates in English to appear after *by*-phrase may stem from a more general violation. Another aspect that has been investigated regarding passive structures is whether the theme (the second object) of a double-object construction can follow a *by*-phrase. Collins states that the second object of the double-object construction in English is not allowed after the *by*-phrase because the only way to rescue such a structure is by moving that theme across the goal DP. Nevertheless, a DOC in MS Arabic in which the theme appears after the *by*-phrase is considered acceptable.

5.4 A note on remnant movement

Collins (2005) observes, based on English data, that IPs, PPs, and CPs, in contrast to resultative secondary predicates and DOC themes, can appear after the external argument in passives. He argues that this phenomenon can be explained through remnant PartP movement, whereby a PP, IP, or CP, contained within PartP, is extracted to the specifier of a projection higher than PartP, and then PartP itself is moved to Spec,VoiceP. The outcome of this remnant movement is that the constituent—PP, IP, or CP—appears after an external argument. Consider Figure 6.

Two movement operations are proposed by Collins (2005) within the remnant movement account. In the first movement operation [shown in Figure 6 (a)], the PP is moved from the complement of V to Spec,XP, placing the PP linearly before PartP. Nevertheless, the second movement operation [shown in Figure 6 (b)], through which PartP is raised from the complement of X Spec,VoiceP, restores the original word order. I argue that a major issue with this proposal is that the
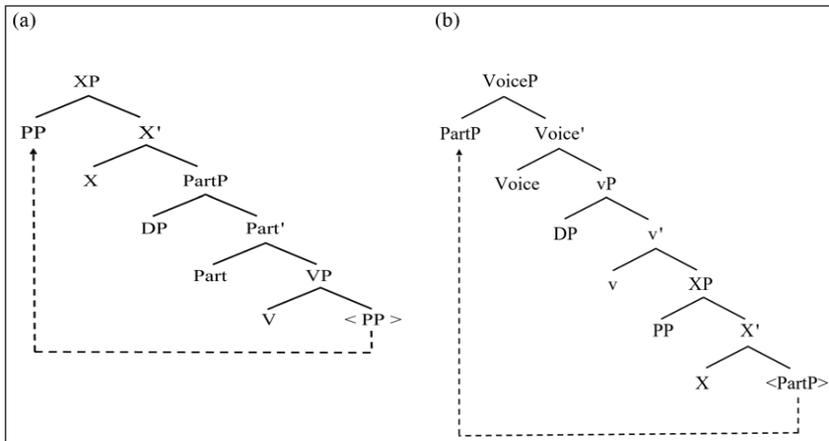
Figure 6. *Remnant movement of PartP.*
(Adapted from Collins 2005: 106).

proposed operation produces the same linear order. Consequently, it seems that the remnant movement operation is proposed for solely deriving the linear order, that is, accounting for the appearance of the relevant constituent after the *by*-phrase. Why should movement occur if the original order is restored? Allowing movement to occur only to generate a linear order of elements is an operation that necessarily lacks restrictiveness and leads to overgeneration (See detailed discussions in Abels 2007, Müller 2015, and Thiersch 2017, among many others). Furthermore, the remnant movement, given its multiple steps, adds complexity to the already complex derivation through which a passive is formed within the smuggling approach.

6. Conclusion

In the present study, I investigate two approaches to passive formation—movement-based and non-movement approach—as well as the question of whether a *by*-phrase in a passive is an optional adjunct or a true argument, based on data from MS Arabic and CN Arabic. I have demonstrated that the movement (smuggling) approach does not adequately explain the patterns observed in the presented data. This is evident in the appearance of the passive of the postverbal object DP and the verbal phrase to the right of the *by*-phrase, as well as facts related to binding, the existence of implicit arguments in short passives, depictive secondary predicates, resultative secondary predicates, and the theme in a double object construction. Remnant movement as a mechanism to circumvent the ability of PPs, IPs, and CPs to follow the *by*-phrase is shown to be problematic due to overgeneration, complexity, and lack of independent trigger. It is, therefore, concluded that the non-movement approach provides a better explanation for passive structures in MS Arabic data, and is thus considered superior to the movement/smuggling approach.

Acknowledgments

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Language, Silence, and the Forbidden: Taboo and Transgression in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*

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Abstract This study examines *American Dervish* as a literary investigation into taboo, silence, and transgression in the context of the Muslim–American diasporic community. Employing the established theory of Foucault, Bataille, Butler, and Derrida alongside other thinkers, this examination analyzes how Akhtar uses language, silence, and narrative ellipsis to challenge religious orthodoxy, gendered confinement, and cultural control. It demonstrates how acts of transgression, dietary transgression, interfaith union, and retrospection narrative become symbolic provocations to institutionalized religion and community control. Silence emerges as at once a survival mechanism and a means of transgression and comes to bear on the identity of protagonists and underscores the limitations of representation. The findings indicate that Akhtar reimagines taboo as a performative literary device, challenging moral absolutism and creating discursive spaces for the negotiation of hybridity, identity, and self-sovereignty in a transnational context. By placing *American Dervish* in the larger body of scholarship debating religion, liberty, and diasporic identity, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding power, gender, and cultural representation in the body of the prevalent contemporary Muslim-American literary world.

1. Introduction

The contemporary period is marked by an increase in critical examination of traditional religious orthodoxy, especially among diaspora communities differentiated

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by multicultural hybridity and multifaceted identities. Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* (2012) explores this conflict through the character of Hayat Shah. Hayat is a Pakistani–American teenager whose spiritual coming-of-age creates a setting for examining rigid dogma, paternal constraints, and stifling dissent within the framework of Islam. Located within the socio-political context of 1980s Midwestern America, critical examination is not merely directed against Islamic theology, but also conducts an equally scathing critique of societal mores and gender prescriptions that maintain traditional interpretations. Hayat's growing disaffection with traditional Islamic practices marks an even broader struggle by second-generation Muslim immigrants to balance inherited religious paradigms and customs against the emancipation of secular individuality (Aboul-Ela, 2011; Ahmed, 2021).

Akhtar's writings do not reject Islam categorically; instead, they are an expression of the ideological rigidity of institutionalized religion and an inability to embrace diversity and interpretive variation. Such an understanding copes with Asad's (2003) argument that secular modernity reshapes religious discourse by impacting the knowledge of rational belief and acceptable behavior. The unfolding of the narrative, of defiance by the protagonist to ultimate acceptance, can be read as a counter-discourse, according to Foucault (1978), which re-creates subjectivity through transgression. The moment Hayat eats pork, a forbidden act within Islam, operates as a physical act of defiance and can be read as a corporeal transgression. This bodily invasion aligns with Bataille's (1986) theoretical understanding of taboo, through sovereign expressions of power that blend the sacred and forbidden together.

Furthermore, language is portrayed as a site of struggle that underpins the entire context of the novel. Hayat's probing questions about the divine origin of the Qur'an, as well as the meaning of purity in women, bring to mind Butler's (2021) concept of excitable speech, which challenges dominant discourses by interrogating and subverting subjectivities that are too often marginalized and taboo. Aside from undermining established epistemological claims, the novel challenges sociolinguistic norms of silence and compliance. In presenting an alternative understanding of institutional religious texts, gendered categorizations, and diasporic identification, American Dervish nourishes a discursive space in which the intersections between representation, religion, and opposition are inextricably linked.

The present study focuses on Akhtar's novel as an expression of rejection theology, which critiques transgressions and taboos in society as occurrences that are both aesthetically and morally charged. To this end, it argues that American Dervish challenges Islamic orthodoxy, particularly in comparison to Western secular ideologies, and situates the text within larger debates about religion, freedom, and cross-cultural engagement (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 2012).

2. Literature Review

Even though religion is based on intrinsic spiritual needs and moral codes, it rapidly consolidates into institutional structures of power and social rules. *American Dervish* explores how religious taboos become tools for regulation and symbols of transgressions. Based on the theoretical perspectives of Foucault, Bataille, Butler,

and Derrida, this study demonstrates how Akhtar's memoir navigates the religious taboos and their intense deconstruction.

2.1. Taboo and transgression in contemporary fiction

In today's literary scope, few subjects pose as equally challenging and mentally stimulating as those that challenge social conventions, particularly those that transgress taboos. These narrative topics, based on the very confines imposed by society, have shifted from offbeat issues to the center of literary discussion, successfully challenging sexual, cultural, and political prohibitions. Contemporary literature does not tread warily around the taboo; on the contrary, it questions, exposes, and often supersedes such social conventions in an unflinching forthrightness (Horlacher et al., 2010; Nicklas, 2011).

In his sweeping study of post-1968 British literature, Jim Byatt argues that contemporary novels often centre on spotlighting identities that continue to be culturally marginalized, revealing the criminally transgressive, such as paedophiles and sociopaths, in addition to socially stigmatized others such as the elderly and the disabled. Byatt believes that such individuals are situated in an ironic position where their formal membership is acknowledged, yet their experiences are continually discredited. Byatt notes that contemporary literature's interest in such characters marks a sustained attempt in literary discourse to take up identities regarded as taboo, not just in terms of ethical judgments, but through cultural stagnation (Byatt, 2009).

The argument is supported by groundbreaking studies by Horlacher, Glomb, and Heiler, which clarify how English literature continuously reconfigures the concept of taboo through a historical continuity framework. They trace out the course of continuity from 16th-century literature to post-Holocaust writing, arguing that the representation of taboo, through themes such as incest, scatology, and extreme ideologies, among others, serves simultaneously as an arena of transgression and as an articulation of society's repression. Specifically, they find in the postmodern literary space an aesthetic transgression whereby the unspeakable serves as the stimulus for emerging narrative forms (Horlacher et al., 2010).

2.2. The function of silence in literature

In literary criticism, silence is more than just soundlessness; it is an expressive force, a figure of rhetoric, and a narrative technique that expresses meaning beyond spoken discourse. At the margins of discourse, silence is an arena where emotions, doubts, and modes of resistance take root, offering an effective means through which both the author and the reader can interact with the unspoken (Shcherbak & Potienko, 2021).

Amer, Naser, and Abdulmajeed argue in their extensive research that silence serves as the embodiment of humanism in narrative fiction, thereby enhancing emotional depth and fostering a deeper connection between the author and the reader. Silence should never be considered passivity or something harmful in poetry and fiction, but rather understood as a key element of communication that evokes sentiments in the public while maintaining the intrinsic complexity of the story (Amer et al., 2019).

Srivastava discusses the importance of silence in more depth and suggests that it can be more expressive than words. In literature, silence serves several functions, such as the creation of tension, the emphasis of tragic elements, and the creation of emotional punctuation. Meaningful silences, especially ones arising from omission, occur in literature; these silences attract the attention of the reader as they make him or her reflect on underlying contradictions or moral choices (Srivastava, 2022).

Scholarship reinforces that silence is a powerful and thoughtful element, both an ethical choice and one of aesthetic value, having the ability to expand literacy. In challenging the supremacy of spoken words, silence is theorized as a space where meaning is enriched in the absence of words, prompting readers to engage with the text on more than just speech-based levels of cognition.

2.3. Language, identity, and cultural conflict

Language is not only used as a means of communication, but it also serves as a repository of cultural memory, marking diversity, and often emerges as the key theme in discourses regarding ideas of belonging. In literature, the dynamics of language and identity are particularly notable as characters cross cultural borders, often marked by tensions and processes of assimilation, resistance, or hybridity (Akintayo et al., 2024).

As a representative of diasporic literature studies, Zhao (2024) explains how characters in specific literary texts employ language as a means of coping with the various challenges of migration and cultural identity. Intertextuality is recognized as a tool that operates beyond the presentation of cultural duality; it instead reveals the latent contradictions experienced by characters caught between opposing cultural loyalties (Zhao, 2024).

Another example of this attitude is apparent in the work of Vydaichuk et al. (2022). They emphasize the profound importance of language in contemporary geopolitical conflicts. Their sociolinguistic analysis demonstrates the significance of language as a national symbol, thereby widening cultural divisions and enmity, especially in contexts where minority languages are subjected to governmental danger or discrimination. Moreover, they argue that without official endorsement through inclusive policies, differences in language can create animosity and strife among groups, as seen in both fiction literature and personal relationships (Vydaichuk et al., 2022). Overall, these studies provide support to the argument that, in literature, language is more than just the representation of identity; it actively participates in the negotiation and creation of that identity. Literature, in the context of cultural tensions, demonstrates that language is more of a battlefield for the creation of personal and collective identity rather than just as an information exchange medium.

2.4. Religion, gender, and the forbidden

The intersection of systems of belief in religion, gendered hierarchies, and societal norms has always drawn scholarly interest among literary critics; a space in which religious values meet society's boundaries and thereby create transgressions that are both moral offenses and turning points in texts. Many literary theorists and various

types of critical approaches have discussed how religions define gender-specific behavior by proscription and often enshrine the feminine body and feminine sexuality as both sacred subjects and conceptual imperils.

In his reading of Douglas Cowan's work, *The Forbidden Body* (2023), Laycock discusses the complicated intersection of sexuality, horror, and religious imagination in literary and media discourses. He assumes that Cowan argues that sexual taboos based on religious assumptions produce horror and curiosity in audiences. The author defines horror mode as the site where repressed desires and moral dilemmas intersect, with their ramifications often represented through religious iconology and ritual acts. Through presenting images of gothic nuns, monstrous feminine specters, and several more representations, such narratives imagine the female body as a site of spiritual danger, erotic fascination, and divinely ordained wrath and place it in the context of religious ideology (Laycock, 2023).

Alongside this critique, Bjork-James (2019) highlights how religious systems demarcate gendered roles through both explicit practices and subtle hierarchies. Through her anthropological research, she discusses how patriarchal religious systems limit women and girls, including taboos about menstruation and regulated dress, while simultaneously granting spiritual power to gendered roles. Interestingly, she recognizes that such restrictions are not strict; there are cultural practices that uphold the spiritual value of transgender and nonbinary people, challenging Western hegemonies regarding gender and religious subordination (Bjork-James, 2019).

Together, these writings demonstrate that literature not only reflects but also critiques the processes by which religious systems demarcate and police gendered identities. Through the representation of the taboo, whether by horror, allegory, or realistic examination, literature provides a space to reconsider notions about power, purity, and the possibility of sacred rebellion.

2.5. Ayad Akhtar and the Muslim–American novel

Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish* has attracted notable scholarly attention, particularly in its tackling of Muslim-American identity, diasporic displacement dynamics, and the complexity of religious orthodoxy. Previous scholarship has critically discussed thematic features such as cultural assimilation, ideological resistance, and the possibility of multiple identities (Ali , 2015; Barzinji & Barzinji, 2016), but there is a significant lack of in-depth studies that focus on language and silence as tools for addressing the forbidden and the transgressive. Shameema (2014) lists overt examples of transgression, such as the desecration of the Quran. Still, it does not cover more sophisticated narrative strategies, like linguistic evasion and ellipsis, that allow for discussion of the forbidden.

The tension between sexual repression and religious guilt, central in the formation of Hayat's character, has been covered in Hasan and Noori (2021); however, the performative function of silence as a socially constructed taboo has never been theorized. Malik (2017) discusses the novel's polyvocality and Sufism about orthodoxy, but does not explore the role of these conceptual tools in symbolic censorship. Similarly, postcolonial theories of hybrids (Handayani, 2020) have overlooked views regarding otherness in language and narration.

In *American Dervish*, Akhtar explores the boundary of Muslim–American identity, depicting characters who are beset by the collision of faith and secularism (Bung, 2024). His writing critiques religious orthodoxy while making its believers more relatable, creating a nuanced portrayal of faith and dissent (Shameema, 2014). Incorporating autobiographical aspects enhances the credibility of his accounts and encourages consideration of cultural stereotypes. Akhtar's works, particularly *Disgraced* (2013), likewise portray the intense existential conflicts surrounding Muslim identity in racially charged American society, demystifying both externalised bias as well as internalised Islamophobia (Hashmi, 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on Akhtar's work, a considerable gap remains in the examination of how the *American Dervish* complexly interweaves silence, religious taboos, and linguistic identity as entwined mechanisms for transgression. Since the literature so far examines these elements separately, insufficient research exists that discusses how their intersection informs the psychological and cultural challenges faced by Muslim–American protagonists. This paper seeks to bridge such gaps through a close examination of language, silence, and the forbidden things within the text. Akhtar's prose is thus both a representation and a critique of Muslim–American life, questioning the subtle interconnections between gender, religion, politics, and identity.

3. Methodology

In this study, qualitative interpretive methodology is used based on close textual analysis to investigate the functioning of taboo, transgression, language, and silence in *American Dervish* by Ayad Akhtar. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault, Georges Bataille, Judith Butler, and Jacques Derrida, the analysis examines how linguistic decisions, narrative gaps, and silence function as aesthetic and ethical practices disseminated throughout the novel. The most significant plot events, like Qur'anic interpretation, food and sexual transgression, interfaith relationships, and retrospective narration, are discussed to demonstrate the negotiation and resistance of the issue of religious orthodoxy, gendered power, and diasporic identity. This approach to literature is non-empirical and textual, grounded in close reading over time, accompanied by secondary scholarship on Muslim–American literature, gender studies, and postcolonial theory, to place the novel within the broader discourse of religion, power, and representation.

4. Language and the Codification of the Forbidden

Language, in both its spoken and written modalities, constitutes not only the most elemental but also the most cultivated system of signs. Its creative deployment necessarily raises complex aesthetic considerations. No individual articulates their language with perfect precision, clarity, or completeness. Variations in linguistic usage emerge from the speaker's subjective disposition and the contextual variables, namely the nuance and connotative load of the utterance. Accordingly, the misuses, irregularities, and humorous disparities in language use are not merely deviations

but rather vehicles of expressive clarity in literary representation, particularly in the articulation and appropriation of taboo and transgression. These phenomena invite critical inquiry into the generative mechanics of language and its capacity for literary innovation and divergence (Yaffe, 2018; Elaref, 2025).

The integration of English and Urdu within a single novel, manifested in embedded phrases, idioms, and even scripts, epitomizes linguistic hybridity as an artistic strategy. This interlingual code-switching highlights the author's creative ingenuity while simultaneously foregrounding dialectal variation and sociolectal distinctions. Such linguistic diversity underscores character differentiation and dramatizes the often discordant responses received by the narrator from minor figures. Moreover, within the broader Western literary milieu, the insertion of emic expressions, culturally saturated and semantically dense, resists translation. These terms operate as cultural signifiers that evoke estrangement not only for monolingual English readers but also for Muslim interlocutors within the dominant cultural framework.

Additionally, the deliberate lexical and syntactic anomalies in English usage, including disreputable or colloquial expressions, further disrupt normative aesthetic expectations. The conspicuous inclusion of vulgarities and sexually charged language serves as a subversive rhetorical device, undermining conventional literary decorum. This strategic affront to linguistic propriety evokes the notion of constrained language theory, wherein normative boundaries often police expressivity. However, through this deliberate violation of decorum, the text revitalizes the literary landscape with an unorthodox yet profound and aesthetically potent linguistic vitality (Domínguez, 2009).

4.1. Religious discourse: interpretation, policing, and identity in American Dervish

In *American Dervish*, Ayad Akhtar weaves a nuanced novel that interrogates the role of Islamic scripture and religious discourse within the diasporic Pakistani–American Muslim community. Central to the novel is the transmission of Qur'anic teachings, their interpretation across generational and ideological divides, and the subtle and overt practices that seek to preserve orthodoxy. Through richly symbolic scenes and dialogic confrontations, Akhtar explores how the sacred text becomes a site of devotion, resistance, and identity negotiation (Barzinji & Barzinji, 2016).

From the outset, the novel presents a community entangled in the act of quoting and interpreting the Quran. Characters wield sacred verses to justify deeply embedded norms, but also to resist them. Hayat's initial aspiration to become a Hafiz symbolizes an uncritical embrace of inherited faith, yet his gradual skepticism mirrors a broader movement toward interpretive autonomy. This shift is narratively crystallized in the university classroom scene where historical Qur'anic criticism triggers rupture and withdrawal among Muslim students, and in Hayat's private exhilaration following both the consumption of forbidden pork and the framing of the Qur'an as a historical text rather than an immutable divine utterance moments that foreground embodied transgression and intellectual doubt as parallel challenges to religious authority (Akhtar, 2012). He begins to question the divine origin of the text, unsettling the theological certainties around him (Shameema, 2014).

The novel's symbolic moments underscore this tension. This is quite apparent when Hayat's enthusiasm about a cable television channel that includes images of gambling and secular Western media causes Banooji's reprimanding reaction with severe religious rebuke (Akhtar, 2012). This illustrates the text's juxtaposition of playful disobedience and severe moral correction. Dust, an image repeated throughout the novel, becomes a metaphor for interpretive ambiguity, simultaneously obscuring and connecting divergent readings of the sacred. Mina explains a Sufi principle to Hayat using the analogy of dust, claiming that a true mystic is like dust placed under God's feet. The analogy represents spiritual humility, but it also invokes ideas of indeterminacy and marginality (Yasin, 2021).

This metaphor evolves into a duality of Qurans, one wielded as a local mechanism of control, the other a more universalized expression of Sunni Islam. These twin Qurans, like two sides of a coin, generate both spiritual tension and ideological rupture. Hayat's conflict is outlined through opposed readings of the Quran; one of them is a local, authoritarian reading, and the other is a universal, humanistic reading. This contrast powerfully conditions his religious fragmentation, leading to a symbolic renunciation of predetermined doctrine and a move toward interpretive autonomy (Barzinji & Barzinji, 2016).

Akhtar's novel is equally concerned with how religion is policed. Within the narrative, religious authority figures and conservative family members enforce a narrow orthodoxy that resists reinterpretation, most notably through the imam's didactic rigidity in the mosque and the father's insistence on unquestioning obedience within the domestic sphere (Akhtar, 2012). Policing is both institutional, visible in mosque rituals and moral education, and interpersonal, enacted within family dynamics. This dual mechanism is further exposed through Hayat's coerced complicity in denouncing Mina's interfaith relationship and his gradual internalization of moral surveillance as a form of religious duty (Akhtar, 2012). Moments such as the Mosque scene and the Quran Burning scene crystallize the community's struggle with theological dogmatism, theocratic coercion, and the fear of liberal dissent (Shameema, 2014).

In *American Dervish*, religious precepts are enforced not just through pedagogical techniques but also through emotional coercion and social shame. This dynamic is well exemplified in the case of Hayat being shamed in public for his decision to read the Quran in English, wherein authentic religious intention is belittled. The Qurans themselves, handled with ritualistic respect through kissing, wrapping, and respect, are symbolic instruments of domination, symbolizing divine authority and conformity with social expectations (Akhtar, 2012). The novel powerfully depicts how certain verses are brought in to enforce orthodox convictions, as seen in debates over Quran interpretations, wherein contextual nuance is forgotten in order to endorse discriminatory points of view. These episodes promote a multifaceted intertextual relationship wherein personal experiences of religion are shaped, and often constrained, by the abstract sanctity of religious scriptures (Shameema, 2014).

The policing of belief and the rigidity of interpretation precipitate deep identity conflicts, especially for younger characters navigating multicultural American realities. This tension is narratively embodied in Hayat's oscillation between mosque instruction, domestic surveillance, and the intellectual freedom he encounters in

academic spaces, where religious certainty is unsettled rather than affirmed (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat, caught between the expectations of his faith and the allure of secular freedom, represents the generational and ideological fracture within diasporic Muslim life. His eventual disavowal of orthodoxy is mirrored by his father's late, understated confession of unbelief, a moment that retrospectively reframes paternal authority as performative rather than devout (Akhtar, 2012), suggesting that the search for identity often necessitates a severance from inherited structures (Yasin, 2021).

The novel eventually portrays the cultural consequences of such inflexibility, demonstrating how interfaith conversation can destabilize community bonds and ostracize individuals. However, it simultaneously promotes the potential to find meaning and belonging outside rigid systems. The narrative ends with an empty grave, indicating the conclusion to Hayat's struggle against religious texts, a tragic end to a long struggle over interpretative discretion and institutional power. Moreover, *American Dervish* expertly portrays the complex role of the Quran and Islamic doctrine in the immigrant experience. Akhtar does not mock, but through his inquiry, he uncovers the nuanced ambiguities surrounding faith, the fragility of inherited status, and the potentially hazardous consequences that can ensue in adherence to doctrine. Ultimately, this is an indispensable inquiry into the double role of religion, serving both as cause and potential site of dissonance.

4.2. Novel voice: framing taboo through retrospective narration

Ayad Akhtar uses a bifurcated structure to his narrative, interweaving into it an embedded story taking place in the summer of 1985 and an introspective one surrounding the year 2008. The complex time structure not only captures the malleability that lies in memory but, additionally, provides a discursive space in which sensitive themes—like religious uncertainty, transgressions in sexuality, and cultural dissonance are both emotively expressed and discursively elaborated. Through the contemplative perception of the burgeoning Hayat, he returns to his adolescence, and through his introspective perspective, allows for examination and, to some extent, healing from the pain, bewilderment, and isolation experienced then (Handayani, 2020).

From its opening paragraph, the novel signals its investment in memory as a site of trauma and novelistic reconstruction. The adult Hayat's retrospective voice immediately situates remembrance as an act of controlled disclosure, withholding narrative clarity while foregrounding affective intensity (Akhtar, 2012). An enigmatic reference to the "Night of the Hearts" evokes a specter of youthful suffering, a memory shrouded in emotional opacity. This moment is deliberately severed from its narrative context, functioning as a mnemonic wound whose meaning is deferred rather than explained (Akhtar, 2012).

Only at the novel's end does this haunting image resolve, revealing the full weight of repressed experience. The frame narration functions strategically, using affectively charged and sensorially rich language to shield the reader from blunt exposition while preserving the disquiet of taboo recollections. Through this delayed revelation, particularly the retrospective reckoning with Mina's humiliation and Hayat's moral complicity, the novel transforms memory into a space of ethical self-indictment

rather than nostalgic recovery (Akhtar, 2012). The emotional dissonance between past and present selves is thus mediated through this technique, enabling Hayat to explore the irreconcilable contradictions of his youth with both immediacy and distance (Shameema, 2014).

The recursive structure moving from present recollection to past immersion and back again mirrors Hayat's psychological struggle. In this oscillation, we find what Shameema describes as an intricately layered textual reality in which cultural stereotypes and individual experiences coalesce and fracture. Hayat's narration does not simply recall events; it reconfigures them through quotation, sensory impression, and selective silencing, thereby revealing the constructive and distorting roles of novel memory (Shameema, 2014).

The novel's retrospective narration enables Hayat to revisit episodes of religious indoctrination, mysticism, and intergenerational conflict with a blend of reverence, bewilderment, and yearning. These scenes are often marked by emotionally charged language that captures his alienation from both American secularism and inherited Islamic orthodoxy. Hayat's internal dialogue, saturated with guilt, shame, and yearning, exposes the affective costs of navigating cultural and spiritual expectations in a liminal identity space (Yasin, 2021).

Ambiguity becomes the dominant rhetorical strategy. Akhtar's narration persistently withholds moral resolution, particularly in his retrospective treatment of Mina's suffering, his portrayal of Hayat's betrayal, and the moments of illicit pleasure that punctuate his religious education, all of which are rendered without explicit repentance or justification (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat does not resolve the contradictions he faces; instead, he narrates them with tonal instability, oscillating between reverent evocation and ironic distance. This oscillation is especially evident in his simultaneous attraction to Qurʾanic beauty and skepticism toward its divine authority, a tension sustained rather than resolved in the closing pages (Akhtar, 2012). This ambiguity reflects the instability of his identity and the indeterminate moral status of the transgressions he recounts. His voice, shaped by time and introspection, offers a humanized and multifaceted approach to the treatment of taboo, one that privileges affect over doctrinal clarity (Yasin, 2021).

Akhtar's introspective attitude in *American Dervish* transcends major taboo themes using an evocative, deeply personal voice. His examination of mysticism and spirituality is punctuated by a mixture of devotion and skepticism, encapsulated by Hayat's ambitions, which lay bare both his spiritual ambitions and his struggle against entrenched systems of belief. His internal contradictions are expressed through accounts of anguish, bereavement, and eventual peace, mirroring the emotional consequences that come into play when one oscillates through one's own identity in different frameworks. His expression of personal guilt and shame is relayed through emotionally charged and delicately articulated language, implying an internal inability to reconcile. His struggle is ultimately depicted as an ongoing, evolving voyage, shaped by evolving conceptions and events over time (Yasin, 2021).

Akhtar's use of retrospective narration in *American Dervish* is more than a stylistic preference; it is an ethical model for addressing historical experience. By locating his adolescent crisis in the space marked by uncertainty, emotional complication, and self-analysis, the narrative achieves a strong balance between personal investigation,

analytic assessment, and revelation. Combining complex framings and temporal stratification provides a moving portrait of an emerging individual trying to reconcile imposed beliefs, repressed desires, and fractured identities. With this technique, Akhtar's novel successfully traverses the complex landscape of social taboos with skill, sensitivity, and artistic agility.

5. The Role of Silence and the Unspeakable

In *American Dervish*, Ayad Akhtar employs silence not as an absence, but as a presence; a powerful discursive tool through which repression, resistance, and identity are negotiated. The novel's portrayal of unspoken cultural codes, religious orthodoxy, and gendered constraints crafts a layered narrative that speaks as much through its omissions as its utterances. Silence becomes a means of coping with trauma, negotiating cultural dissonance, and articulating unspeakable truths in a transnational and post-9/11 American Muslim context (Asad, 2003; Ahmed, 2021; Baykara & Kaçmaz, 2021).

5.1. Cultural and religious tensions: the silenced spaces of belief

In *American Dervish*, Hayat Shah's psychological and emotional status is shaped both by words and silences. These silences, thick, ubiquitous, and frequent, are the unseen underpinnings of life lived in a liminal space: between Pakistan and America, between Islamic traditionalism and secular liberal values, and between family duty and personal dreams. In his struggles to negotiate the expectations that arise from his orthodox Islamic upbringing and the multicultural values in his American environment, his sense of self is created not only by the beliefs or words he speaks but also by those that he does not speak.

The episodes of non-verbal communication, like extended silences, stifled confessions, and submerged truths, express far more than simple ambiguity; they function as narrative signs of deep fractures between faith, desire, and belonging. This is particularly evident in the strained domestic scenes where Hayat and his father coexist in affective distance, their shared routines masking an unspoken recognition of divergent beliefs and unfulfilled expectations (Akhtar, 2012). Hayat's latent conflict with his father thus reflects a generational disillusionment articulated through absence rather than confrontation.

Even in the novel's closing revelation of the father's unbelief, the lack of prior verbal articulation retrospectively charges earlier silences with the weight of tacit dissent and deferred recognition (Akhtar, 2012). Even with no direct exchange of words between the two, their mutual silence becomes both reproach and affirmation of the widening rift between conservative tradition and the seductive pull of American liberalism. Similarly, Mina's inability to voice her trauma cannot be read as personal weakness but as an index of cultural restraint; her enforced silence following public humiliation and betrayal signifies a gendered ethic of honor in which suffering must remain unspoken to preserve familial and communal cohesion (Akhtar, 2012), with honor prioritized over the articulation of self (Handayani, 2020).

Such silences are not gratuitous; instead, they are part of the diasporic dynamic. Speaking out about religious leaders or conventional familial ideals in immigrant Muslim populations often jeopardizes acceptance within society or leads to personal loss of dignity. Silence is therefore considered to be a survival technique; a way of dealing with moral and cultural dilemmas without direct confrontation. This is exemplified by the example of Hayat, who keeps his doubts about religion and his growing inner strife from the eyes of others. Hence, his silence is reflective of the broader sociocultural sphere in which dissent has to be hidden, thereby influencing mental health (Ali, 2015).

In addition, silences enunciated within the novel have a specifically gendered quality. Unlike Hayat's silences, cast within a context of development, Mina's silences encompass a limiting set of social constraints. Her voice is not just absent; instead, she is constantly on the margins, with her voice overshadowed by the patriarchal ethic of morality, making her agency unarticulable. Through this, Akhtar clarifies how silence is not just a lack of vocalization; it is a site of power, oppression, and resistance within voice discourse.

In the narrative, silence operates on a dual level as an aesthetic structure and a moral ground. It is a site where two opposing systems of morality meet and stand against each other, requiring subjects to speak out on their terms or keep silent about their tenuous places within a vulnerable group. Within these silent spaces, Akhtar unearths tropes characteristic of diasporic fiction while also investigating the emotional toll of stifled ethnic expressions and strict standards of morality. Here, silence is depicted as inherently discursive, embodied by tension, disunion, and, finally, comprehension.

5.2. Silence as strategy: identity, trauma, and religious dissonance

Silence goes beyond trauma or repression in *American Dervish*; instead, it becomes an effective and contemplative method of facing a conflicted identity and incompatible ideologies. This change away from religious beliefs is not achieved through overt rejection or adversarial conversation. Instead, this development is carried out within the muted areas of internal withdrawal and subtle resistance; a development that is indicative of the idea of performative silence, as Butler (2021) claims, whereby silence is a political statement. Silence is not passive under such conditions; instead, it is a deliberate refusal to acquiesce to the discursive norms of the situation by choosing not to respond on those terms.

Incidents such as the public burning of the Qurʾan and Hayat's morally fraught participation in Mina's exclusion are not merely narrative devices; they function as ethical ruptures in which communal orthodoxy violently overrides individual conscience, compelling Hayat to act against his own affective intuitions in the name of doctrinal loyalty (Akhtar, 2012). These moments mark turning points where the struggle between theological absolutism and emotional truth approaches catastrophic intensity. Such incidents exemplify the novel's "unspeakable" events, acts of extreme cultural and religious gravity that are deliberately foreclosed from open dialogue within the community.

Consequently, Hayat's silence, marked by shame and retrospective self-reproach, replaces verbal confession, indicating that moral reckoning unfolds internally rather

than through public acknowledgment (Akhtar, 2012). It is precisely these silences that nourish Hayat's moral understanding, as his ethical awakening emerges not through doctrinal clarification but through the corrosive persistence of guilt, leading to a gradual erosion of faith that parallels the slow disintegration of a self formed under coercive belief systems (Hasan & Noori, 2021).

What makes Akhtar's rendering of this process so compelling is its refusal of reductive binaries. *American Dervish* does not pit piety against secularism, or Islam against liberalism, in any simplistic dialectic. Instead, it critiques the ideological rigidity on both ends of the spectrum. On one side stands Islamic fundamentalism with its rigid codes of purity, gendered piety, and theological absolutism. On the other hand is a Western secularism that demands visibility, intelligibility, and assimilation, reducing Muslim identity to either a threat or a symbol (Aboul-Ela, 2011; Said, 2012). Hayat's response is neither a return to belief nor a complete surrender to secular norms. His silence, what we might call his quiet apostasy, is a withdrawal from both paradigms. It is the space of ambiguity where disillusionment is lived rather than declared.

This retraction inward challenges the prevailing discursive presuppositions of transformation based on spectacle and conflict. In terms of Hayat, transformation is instant, disjointed, and often agonizing. It is not the triumphant emancipation of the liberal subject; instead, it is the excruciating disidentification of a subject who belongs neither to the mosque nor the American dream. His silence, therefore, can be read not just as tactical but also as elegiac, expressing a lament for a once-comforting belief, as well as a reality that now seems intolerable.

By defining silence as the site of Hayat's spiritual crisis, Akhtar powerfully demonstrates that discord has both moral and epistemological dimensions. Silence is the defense against appropriation, avoids the dualisms of public discourse, and preserves the nuance of personal belief systems. In this silence, a dynamic but unmoving silence, Hayat begins to imagine and describe a moral vocabulary freed from doctrine and untainted by the need to be recognized.

5.3. Gender, silence, and the politics of voice

In *American Dervish*, the character who best represents the moral subtleties and complexities of silence is Mina. Her passive resistance, based on her secret involvement with Fereydoun and later with Nathan in more obvious ways, must not be seen simply as representing passivity or shame but is instead a considered moral decision based on gender, religion, and the need to preserve cultural identities. In choosing silence, Mina is exercising what Spivak (2023) has called the "subaltern's refusal"; a silence not of absence but of choice in not participating in the discourses that would make her freedom either shameful or immoral.

Mina's silence is dual: it is used to safeguard her daughter from society's imposition of shame while also maintaining the tenuous honor of her family; however, it also deepens her emotional isolation and constricts her sense of agency. This duality is most starkly dramatized in Mina's refusal to publicly defend her relationship with Nathan and in her quiet acceptance of exile after Hayat's denunciation, moments in which self-erasure becomes the price of preserving

communal dignity (Akhtar, 2012). Through the trope of unrevealed sorrow and moral restraint, Mina embodies the deeply ingrained gendered expectations of patriarchal honor systems, whereby women's voices are subordinated to collective respectability. Her final disappearance from Hayat's life, narrated retrospectively and without narrative restitution, underscores how female subjectivity is rendered expendable within moral economies that privilege male authority and doctrinal purity (Akhtar, 2012). Her own story of coming-of-age, albeit less foregrounded than Hayat's, thus presents a powerfully moving indictment of the structural constraints on women's agency, even within narratives that seek to unsettle inherited conventions (Handayani, 2020).

The characterization of Mina as a subversive agent arises from the way that she exercises agency; not necessarily through overt disobedience or openly expressed dissent, but through the emotional integrity she exudes and her unshakeable commitment to moral principle. Her form of resistance is marked by its pacifist nature, driven by emotional clarity and moral stringency. As described by Saba Mahmood (2005), agency about religious norms has a surprising habit of manifesting through such acts of submission, perseverance, or strategic silence, and this confounds liberal understandings that define freedom exclusively through protest. Mina is the perfect illustration of this idea; she is neither definitively compliant nor definitively oppositional to compliance, but instead inhabits the moral space between resistance and obedience.

The ambivalence of Mina's green veil is skillfully analyzed through its symbolic representation. At first, the veil is shown to be a symbol of modesty and piety. Akhtar redefines it as a site of multiple interpretations; both a material veil and a site of contradictions that various contexts share. It is a site of semiotic conflict where the meanings of impurity, desire, loyalty, and independence converge. Underneath the veil is a tattoo, representing her identity, her covered truth, and her strength, making her body both sacred and profane. This opposition mirrors the instability of cultural symbols and the danger of assigning a single political reading to women's religious practices (Mahmood, 2005).

Mina's silence is then theorized as a contemplative exploration of the complex power relations of both silence and expression that permeate the lives of Muslim women in diaspora. Her silence is both a profound expression of a desire to mourn and a very explicit statement of agency; a tool whereby she claims, maintains, and authenticates her space on her terms. Her silence is not only a protective and retributive function that plays a role in survival, but is also a signal of marginalization. In not speaking about her pain, Mina becomes the central witness of the narrative, shedding light on the consequences of piety, the burden of gendered expectations, and the pursuit of dignity amidst erasure (Mahmood, 2005).

5.4. Community silence and gendered discipline

The communal silence works not just as a societal norm, but also as a tool of moral control. This insistent but subtle influence is successful in curbing opposition and constructing gender relations. The community's reaction to Mina's cross-difference romantic engagement with Nathan is a classic example of such a dynamic, bringing

on a multifaceted web of guilt, unease, and systematic amnesia. Her desire, autonomous, authentic, and quietly rebellious, is not read by the community as a symbol of love but is seen instead as a betrayal of religious doctrine, honor codes, and community compliance. In exploring the process of reconsideration, one sees the transmutation of female agency into something that is deemed a kind of cultural betrayal.

Mina's romantic involvement becomes the stimulus that triggers the systems of social control. Rather than confronting her about her situation directly, the community takes the more subtle approach of enforcement: silence. The silence appears in the form of implicit condemnation, out-of-the-way stares, and polite exclusion. The silence is not to be underestimated; it has the powerful implications of judgment. This is what Foucault might describe as a "disciplinary silence": a performative absence that regulates behavior not by way of explicit bans but by the soft, unstated power of expectations from society (Foucault, 1978).

Hayat, who is defined early on by his naivety and abiding reverence, becomes an actor in silencing by way of emotional immaturity, zealous religiosity, and instinctual jealousy. His betrayal of Mina is not performed out of malevolence but is instead the result of indoctrination; he has internalised patriarchal reasoning promulgated by the group to the degree that his pursuit of righteousness is used as a method of her marginalisation. Submission to power, according to Butler, is not only about repression of oneself but about actively silencing others. Hayat's transformation from oblivious actor to guilt-ridden narrator provides evidence of the moral implications of such complicity (2021).

The novel portrays the application of cultural and religious norms along gender lines. Men are allowed discursive and moral leeway, while women—especially those such as Mina, who disrupt existing norms—suffer punitive measures in the form of exclusion. The control of their lives is systematically outside of public view, their behavior is efficiently erased from public memory, and social norms place restrictions on their decisions. When Hayat's father pressures him to leave Mina behind, his motives lie not in hate but in fears; more specifically, fears related to scandal and strife, as well as the unsettling expression of female agency. In this instance, then, the erasure takes on more than what it means for individuals, creating repercussions on a larger political level (Barzinji & Barzinji, 2016).

Akhtar's critique goes beyond the study of overt expressions of subjugation. He highlights the pervasive authoritarianism inherent within cultural norms, depicting the fear of shaming one's family that suppresses self-expression, dampens aspiration, and ultimately makes life one of regret. Mina's exile is a direct consequence of such societal repression. Condemning her is not enough; she is made unrecognizable. Thus, *American Dervish* unflinchingly documents the debilitating consequences of a society that values moral correctness at the cost of openness and complicity, creating a state of ignorance (Handayani, 2020).

In the given narrative, Akhtar clarifies how silence is a tool of oppression in diasporic communities at the juncture of religion, culture, and gender. This silence works not by force but by a lack of discussion; it speaks not by loudness but by muffled voices behind closed doors, thus creating a collective amnesia about those who have tried to transgress set norms.

5.5. Narrative gaps and the ethics of forgetting

The structural integrity of *American Dervish* is built not only on remembered but also on lost, hidden, or deliberately occluded experiences. Hayat's remembering narrative is marked by the pervasive use of ellipses, gestures to temporal silences, fuzzy memories, and narrative suspensions that are resistant to full articulation. These gaps in the narrative are not to be read as voids in memory but instead reflect deliberate structural and moral decisions that illuminate the problem of the protagonist to describe the ineffable. The things Hayat chooses to leave out or to falsify, especially in relation to the "grave night", indicate trauma but also align with the restrictions of what can be said without compromising the fragile integrity of faith, family, and self. The novel is therefore illustrative of precisely what Jacques Derrida identifies as the "limit of representation": the edge where language is unable to withstand the pressure of intense emotional or moral tension (2016).

The moments of silence in the novel are not random or exclusively psychologically based; instead, they serve a crucial function. These silences involve the reader in the dynamics of remembering and forgetting, asking us to ponder not just the content that is being conveyed but also the underlying motivation for the conveyance of that content. Hayat's tactical silences at critical junctures compel us to consider the ethical burdens of storytelling: the formation of narrative, the foregrounding of particular voices, and the truths that remain hidden beneath the surface of seeming coherence. Akhtar's representation includes the process of remembering as an ethically inflected task, complicated, selective, and prey to the dangers of self-delusion (Elaref, 2025).

When Hayat immerses the Qur'an in a container full of hibiscus petals, it is a turning point in the story. The act should not be interpreted as a blasphemous act of apostasy against Islam, but as an aesthetic representation of estrangement, an explicit attempt to separate the sacred book from its possible capacity for causing suffering. The transience of the petals is a stark contrast with the heaviness of scripture, thus highlighting the need for a shift towards a more humane and nourishing vision. Through this pictorial allegory, Akhtar rethinks apostasy not as a sin but as deep anguish resulting from a theological tradition that has not treated compassion as its highest priority. With this, the novel makes a strong critique of orthodox aspects in religious language, which tend towards regulations, not empathy, and dogmatic severity, not love (Barzinji & Barzinji, 2016).

The parts of Hayat's tale that are left unspoken carry as much weight as those that are spoken. His silence regarding Muhammad's ambitions, Mina's anguish, and the implications of treason is not evasion but serves as a stylistic recourse based on indeterminacy and introspection. The text avoids conclusions in matters of morality or making final assertions since such certainty would invalidate the nuanced realities it wants to present. In this sense, the calculated use of silence by Akhtar serves stylistically as a counterpoint to the stark rationality of cultural precepts.

5.6. Silence as a poetics of transgression

In *American Dervish*, silence not only emerges as a thematic issue but also serves as a deliberate device, encompassing both aesthetic and moral implications, in its

exploration of the complexities of identity, trauma, and religion. Characters use silence to traverse the societal taboos of gender, sexuality, faith, and affiliation. These silences are not to be seen as empty; instead, they are rich with implications of suffering, resistance, complicity, and desire (Shcherbak & Potienko, 2021). Whether expressed as Mina's silences of protection, Hayat's selective memory, or the group's communal amnesia, silence is both a symptom and a method of survival.

Notably, Akhtar's novel makes clear that the realm of the unknown is not distinct from the world of language; it is inextricably linked to it. The novel's polyphonic structure, self-reflexive narrative voice, and deliberate omissions challenge the presumption that one can definitively say who one is. Instead, identity surfaces in the silences between what one can say and what is not sayable, and between the stories that can be told and those that cannot (Amer et al., 2019). In this way, *American Dervish* not only challenges religious orthodoxy but also performs a fundamental reflexivity about the limits and boundaries of narrative itself.

Silence is redefined in Akhtar's work as a subversive device; a means to interrogate the simplifying tendencies of both secular liberal and fundamentalist narratives. The narrative emphasizes complexity in situations where ideological systems demand simplicity, and ambiguity in situations where cultural discourses require clarity (Amer et al., 2019). Most importantly, the novel's greatest subversive move is in not resolving the tension between silence and speech, thus putting readers in the uncomfortable position of dealing with unspoken realities and inviting more thoughtful examination of all that is not said or suppressed.

6. Conclusion

In *American Dervish*, Ayad Akhtar stages a bold literary inquiry into the nature of taboo and transgression within the Muslim–American experience, dramatizing the moral turbulence of youth confronting orthodoxy. The novel's critique unfolds through Hayat's gradual estrangement from inherited Islamic certainties and his navigation of forbidden desires, exposing how religious dogma often silences personal truth. Akhtar's portrayal resonates with a generational tide of rebellion not only against religious conservatism in Muslim societies but also against the reductive binaries that shape identity in both the West and the East (Shameema, 2014). More importantly, this rebellion is being encoded by the interwoven workings of language and silence that serve as complementary, resistant, and self-fashioning mechanisms, rather than as independent thematic tools.

Hayat's disillusionment, marked by suspicion toward religious infallibility and intensified by the sacred politics of Quranic translation, underscores Akhtar's challenge to the linguistic and theological sanctity of Islamic tradition. By violating the sacredness of untranslated scripture, the novel renders interpretation itself a transgressive gesture, one that fractures the univocal authority of divine language and mirrors the fragmentation of cultural belief (Shameema, 2014). This theological destabilization is accompanied by a more profound emotional rupture, where shame and longing intertwine in Hayat's coming-of-age, and silence becomes the language of interior collapse. A combination of linguistic deviation and narrative silence, as a

unit, constitutes a single aesthetic logic that transforms into a means of doubt and, subsequently, an emotional manual of dismantling belief.

Akhtar's nuanced treatment of silence and the unspeakable transforms the narrative into an elegy for all that is lost when personal truth is subordinated to communal obedience. As the narrative's elisions and memories suggest, the ethics of storytelling itself come under scrutiny; a literary reflection of Derrida's "limit of representation" (Derrida, 2016). Silence in this context is not absence, but resistance; a poetics through which cultural trauma is encoded and desire is cautiously voiced. Language and silence thus converge as mutually constitutive forces, revealing that what cannot be said often carries as much ethical and narrative weight as what is spoken.

The implications of this study reach beyond Akhtar's text. The transgressive interrogation of religious and cultural taboos offers a vital framework for rethinking the politics of representation in Muslim-American literature. Akhtar's work emphasizes the destabilizing potential of taboo as a cultural and rhetorical force (Shameema, 2014). It invites a reconsideration of moral absolutism, cultural regulation, and the necessity of speaking through, and sometimes against, prohibition. By synthesizing acts of linguistic transgression with structures of enforced silence, the novel demonstrates how diasporic subjectivity is forged at the intersection of expression and erasure.

Future research might extend these insights through comparative readings of other contemporary authors, such as Mohsin Hamid and Leila Aboulela, who similarly engage with the dialectics of transgression, desire, and religious identity. Akhtar's novel, stylistically bold and emotionally exacting, renders taboo not only thematically central but also formally generative. In his hands, the unspeakable becomes both a narrative technique and a philosophical challenge, one that probes the fissures of faith, the violence of silence, and the unresolved tension between sin and selfhood (Shameema, 2014).

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Arabic Abstracts

تقويم سلسلة كتب "سوبر غول" (Super Goal) لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية: آراء المعلمين في المدارس السعودية

منصور التميمي

إبراهيم اللهيبي

الملخص

تتقصى هذه الدراسة ستَّ سلاسل من كتب تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية المنضوية تحت اسم "سوبر غول" (Super Goal)، والمعتمدة حاليًا في مراحل التعليم المتوسط والثانوي بالمملكة العربية السعودية. وقد استُخدمت قائمة التقويم التي وضعها ليتز (Litz's evaluative checklist) لتقويم الفاعلية التربوية لهذه السلاسل. وشمل التقويم عددًا من الجوانب التربوية، من بينها التصميم والإخراج، والأنشطة، والمهارات اللغوية، ونوع اللغة، والموضوعات والمحتوى، إضافة إلى الاعتبارات التطبيقية. وتكوّنت عيّنة الدراسة من (223) معلّمًا جرى اختيارهم عشوائيًا، واعتمدت الدراسة مقياس "ليكرت" السباعي (Point Likert Scale-7) أداةً للتقويم. وقد كشفت نتائج الاستبيان عن اتجاهات إيجابية نحو السلسلة الجديدة من حيث التصميم والمحتوى. وعلاوة على ذلك، أظهرت الدراسة أن الكتب حظيت بقبول واستحسان فيما يخص القضايا الحساسة مثل: النوع الاجتماعي (الجندر)، والملاءمة الثقافية؛ مما يشير إلى موثوقية هذه السلاسل الجديدة وقوتها من وجهة نظر المعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقويم الكتب المدرسية، قياس جودة الكتب المدرسية، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية، التقويم، الكتاب المدرسي للغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية.

نقل العناصر الثقافية الخاصة في الترجمة المرئية: *مقابلة ترامب مع قناة العربية نموذجًا*

عبدالرحمن إبراهيم الجمّاز

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسـة ترجمة العناصـر الخاصـة بالثقافة (Culture-Specific Items – CSIs) من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية في سـياق الترجمة المرئية، مع إيلاء اهتمام خاص باسـتراتيجيات الترجمة ودور المترجم بوصـفه فاعلًا في عملية النقل الثقافي. وتهدف الدراسـة إلى تحقيق غايتين رئيسـتين: الأولى تحديد اسـتراتيجيات الترجمة المعتمدة في نقل العناصـر الثقافية الخاصـة من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، والثانية الوقوف على مدى وجود مؤشـرات على فاعلية المترجم في هذا النقل الثقافي. وتحقيقًا لهذين الهدفين، تعتمد الدراسـة تحليلًا كميًا، وتحليلًا نوعيًا في المقام الأول، لمقابلة أجرتها شبكة إخبارية عربية مع الرئيس الأمريكي دونالد ترامب. وقد تمثلت البيانات في أكثر من عشـرين مثالًا من العناصـر الثقافية الخاصـة، اسـتُخرجت من مقابلة مدتها أربع عشـرة دقيقة. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن المترجم/المترجمين اسـتخدموا اسـتراتيجيات متعددة، من بينها الاستبدال، والترجمة المباشرة، والتخصيص، وغيرها من الاستراتيجيات. كما بيّنت النتائج أن المترجمين مالوا إلى اعتماد مقاربة موجِّهة إلى اللغة الهدف في تمثيل العناصـر الثقافية الخاصـة، وهو ما كان ذا أهمية حاسـمة في تحقيق الهدف الثاني للدراسة. وتخلص الدراسـة إلى أن للمترجمين درجة من الفاعلية تتجلّى بوضوح في بعض اختياراتهم الترجمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة السمعية-البصرية (AVT)، دراسات الترجمة، ترجمة الثقافة، نظرية الترجمة، استراتيجيات ترجمة العناصر الثقافية الخاصة.

تحدّيات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة (ESP): دراسة حالة جامعة المجمعة

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الملخص

لا تزال الدراسـات التي تتناول تحدّيات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصـة في جامعة المجمعة محدودة. وتهدف هذه الدراسـة إلى استقصاء التحدّيات التي يواجهها مدرّسو اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة في الجامعة. وتحقيقًا لهذا الهدف، جرى تحليل تصـوّرات مدرّسـي اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصـة بشـأن هذه التحدّيات، إلى جانب الحلول التي اقترحوها للتغلّب عليها، وذلك بالاعتماد على ما يقارب (250) مداخلة صـادرة عن (63) مشـاركًا. وقد اسـتُخدمت في المرحلة الأولى مجموعات نقاش مركّزة عبر الإنترنت، أُديرت بعناية لجمع البيانات ذات الصـلة، ثم جرى تحليلها باسـتخدام اسـتخلاص المحاور وتصنيفها. وكشفت النتائج عن ست فئات رئيسة من التحدّيات، هي:

1. تحدّيات متعلّقة بالمدرّسين

2. تحدّيات متعلّقة بالطلاب

3. تحدّيات متعلّقة بالمواد التعليمية واستراتيجيات التدريس

4. تحدّيات متعلّقة بالتقويم

5. تحدّيات أكثر تخصّصًا

6. تحدّيات متعلّقة بالعلاقة بين مدرّسي اللغة ومدرّسي التخصّصات العلمية.

وقد اقترحت الدراسـة حلولًا محدّدة للتغلّب على كل فئة من هذه التحدّيات. كما جرى اسـتخلاص ومناقشـة عدد من الدلالات المترتبة على النتائج في ضـوء المعطيات المتوصّل إليها، شـملت دلالات تربوية، ودلالات على مسـتوى السـياسـات التعليمية، وأخرى تتعلّق بالبحوث المسـتقبلية. ومن أبرز هذه الدلالات: ضـرورة مراعاة تحليل حاجات الطلاب عند تصـميم المقرّرات، وتحديث الكتب الدراسـية أو اختيار كتب أنسـب، وتوظيف مواد تعليمية داعمة، وإدماج التدريب الذاتي للمدرّسـين، وتنظيم تعاون أكثر فاعلية بين مدرّسـي اللغة ومدرّسـي التخصّـصـات العلمية، فضـلًا عن البحث في تحدّيات أكثر تحديدًا من خلال الجمع بين أسلوب مجموعات التركيز وأساليب نوعية أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحدّيات، اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة، مجموعات التركيز، مدرّسو اللغة، جامعة المجمعة.

بين البحر والسارية: ترميز شاعريّة الطبيعة والإلهي عند ديكنسون وملفيل

سوزان وزّان

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة العلاقة الوثيقة بين شاعريّة الطبيعة والإلهي في أعمال إميلي ديكنسون وهرمان. ففي كتاباتهما، كثيرًا ما يستخدمان الصور والرموز الطبيعية لاستكشاف معتقداتهما الفلسفية والدينية. فقصائد ديكنسون، على سبيل المثال، كثيرًا ما تصوّر الطبيعة بوصفها مصدرًا للجمال والغموض معًا، بينما تستكشف روايات ملفيل العلاقة بين الفرد ورحابة العالم الطبيعي. وتستند القصيدة التوليدية "بين البحر والسارية (Sea and Spar Between)" لنيك مونتفورت ونواه وارديب فروين إلى أعمال ديكنسون وملفيل بعدّة طرائق؛ أوّلًا، توظف القصيدة الصور والرموز الطبيعية لخلق مشهد شعري شاسع ومتغير باستمرار. ثانيًا: تستكشف القصيدة العديد من التساؤلات الميتافيزيقية ذاتها التي استكشفها ديكنسون وملفيل، مثل طبيعة الإله، والعلاقة بين الفرد والكون، ومعنى الوجود الإنساني. غير أنّ قصيدة مونتفورت وستريكلاند تعيد تأويل شاعريّة الطبيعة والإلهي لدى ديكنسون وملفيل بطرائق متعدّدة؛ فاعتمادها على خوارزمية حاسوبية لتوليد المقاطع الشعرية يُفضي إلى تجربة قراءة مفككة ومركبة. ويُقوِّض هذا التفكيك المفاهيم التقليدية للشكل الشعري والمعنى، ويوحي بأن العالم الطبيعي والإلهي ليسا قابلين للمعرفة بالسهولة التي أشار إليها ديكنسون وملفيل أحيانًا. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الكيفية التي تعيد بها قصيدة مونتفورت وستريكلاند تأويل شاعريّة الطبيعة والإلهي عند ديكنسون وملفيل، وذلك من خلال تحليل دقيق لاستخدام الصور والرموز الطبيعية في القصيدة، ومقارنة تمثيلها للطبيعة والإلهي بتمثيلهما في أعمال ديكنسون وملفيل، فضلًا عن تناول دور الخوارزمية الحاسوبية في هذا التأويل الجديد، ومناقشة ما يترتّب عليه من دلالات لفهمنا للعالم الطبيعي والإلهي. وتهمّ هذه الدراسة باحثي الإنسانيات الرقمية، والدراسات الأدبية، والدراسات الدينية، كما تهمّ القارئ العام؛ إذ تتناول العلاقة بين الطبيعة والإلهي والتكنولوجيا، وهي موضوعات وثيقة الصلة بالمجتمع المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطبيعة، الإلهي، الشاعريّة، السارية، البحر، ديكنسون.

حول الاشتقاق التركيبي للبناء للمجهول وعبارات "بواسطة"

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الملخص: لطالما كان تركيب البناء للمجهول، وآليات اشتقاقه، والمكانة التركيبية لعبارات "بواسطة" (by-phrases) فيه، من القضايا الإشكالية التي أثارت اهتمامًا واسعًا في الأدبيات التركيبية (السنتاكتيكية). وقد تبلور في هذا السياق اتجاهان رئيسيان: أحدهما يقوم على افتراض النقل/النقل الالتفافي (movement/smuggling)، والآخر يقدّم بديلًا لا يعتمد على النقل. تُظهر هذه الدراسة أن المقاربة غير القائمة على النقل تتمتع بميزة تفسيرية واضحة على التحليل القائم على النقل، الأمر الذي يُضعف ادعاءات الشمول التفسيري التي يتبنّاها الاتجاه الأخير. وعلى وجه التحديد، أُقدم بيانات لغوية من نمطين من العربية – العربية الفصحى المعاصرة والعربية النجدية – تُقوِّض على نحوٍ جوهري الفرضيات التأسيسية لمقاربة النقل (أو ما يُعرف بالنقل الالتفافي)، وتكشف أن تنبؤاتها لا تحظى بسندٍ من المعطيات اللغوية الملحوظة. وبناءً على ذلك، يخلص التحليل المقدَّم هنا إلى أن البناء للمجهول – سواء أكان مصحوبًا بعبارة "بواسطة"، أم كان مبنيًا للمجهول القصير (الخالي منها) – لا ينطوي على أي عملية نقل (نقل التفافي). وتتمثل إحدى النتائج المترتبة على هذه الحجة في التشكيك في الفرضية الجوهرية لمقاربة النقل (النقل الالتفافي)، ومفادُها أن الحجج الخارجية (external arguments) في بنيتي المعلوم والمجهول تُسقَط تركيبيًا بالطريقة ذاتها تمامًا. وفي المقابل، تُقدَّم المقاربة غير القائمة على النقل، التي تتعامل مع عبارة "بواسطة" بوصفها فضلةً/ملحقًا (adjunct)، بوصفها بديلًا مفضّلًا من الناحية التجريبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تكوين المجهول، النقل الالتفافي (smuggling)، مقاربة غير معتمدة على النقل، عبارات "بواسطة"، الحجج الأصلية، الفضلات (الملحقات)، اللغة العربية الفصحى المعاصرة، اللهجة النجدية.

اللغة، الصمت، والمحرَّم: المحظور والتجاوز في رواية "الدرويش الأمريكي (American Dervish)" لعياد أختر

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الملخص: تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية الدرويش الأمريكي (American Dervish, 2012) لإياد أختر بوصفها استقصاءً أدبيًا لمفاهيم المحرَّم، والصمت، والتجاوز، في سياق الجالية المسلمة الأمريكية في المهجر. وتنطلق الدراسة من توظيف الأطر النظرية الراسخة لكلٍّ من فوكو، وباتايل، وباتلر، ودريدا، إلى جانب مفكرين آخرين، لتحليل الكيفية التي يوظف بها أختر اللغة، والصمت، والحذف السردي من أجل مساءلة الأرثوذكسية الدينية، والقيود الجندرية، وآليات الضبط الثقافي. وتُبيّن الدراسة أن أفعال التجاوز، بما يشمل التجاوزات الغذائية، والاتحاد بين أتباع ديانات مختلفة، والسرد الاستعادي، تتحول إلى استفزازات رمزية موجهة إلى الدين المؤسسي وإلى أنماط السيطرة المجتمعية. كما يتجلى الصمت بوصفه آلية للبقاء من جهة، ووسيلة من وسائل التجاوز من جهة أخرى، إذ يسهم في تشكيل هوية الشخصيات الرئيسة، ويبرز في الوقت ذاته حدود التمثيل والتعبير. وتشير النتائج إلى أن أختر يعيد تصور مفهوم المحرَّم بوصفه أداة أدبية أدائية، تُستخدم لمساءلة النزعة الأخلاقية المطلقة، ولفتح فضاءات خطابية جديدة للتفاوض حول الهجنة، والهوية، والسيادة الذاتية في سياق عابر للحدود القومية. ومن خلال وضع رواية "الدرويش الأمريكي (American Dervish)" ضمن الحقل الأوسع للدراسات التي تناقش الدين، والحرية، والهوية في سياق الشتات، تسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء النقاش الدائر حول السلطة، والنوع الاجتماعي، والتمثيل الثقافي في المشهد المعاصر للأدب المسلم الأمريكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المحرَّم؛ التجاوز؛ الشتات؛ الأرثوذكسية الدينية؛ النوع الاجتماعي؛ الهجنة؛ التمثيل الثقافي

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