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The Intended Reader and the Translator's Capital

Cultural and Social Sensitivity When Translating

"the N-word" in Huckleberry Finn

BY LARS LILJEGREN

Undeniably, many of us uncritically read translations as if they are the original text (the source text),¹ thus reducing translators to mere copiers. Whereas many translators also claim that they try to stay as close as possible to the original author's text, style and content, as a case of "voluntary servitude",² there is research to indicate that this is often not the case. Instead, despite their seeing their strategy as voluntary servitude, the individual translators' own aesthetic preferences often shine through their translations regardless of whom they translate.³

Nevertheless, the aim for many translators is still to stay as close as possible to the source text. In so doing, they force the reader to adapt to the foreignness of the translated text, a strategy often termed *foreignization* by Translation Studies scholars.⁴ In short, foreignized translations retain foreign elements, such as the names of social institutions or foreign-sounding names, in the translated text. The opposite, which is a very common strategy, especially in the English-speaking world, is to adapt the text to suit the target readers instead.⁵ This strategy is often termed *domestication*.⁶ The aim in such cases is to give the reader of the translation (the target text), the same opportunity to understand the text as was given to the source-culture reader of the source text, or to make the text feel as part of the target culture, which may also include adapting it to the norms of the target culture. Indeed, a translator's understanding of the moral views, aesthetic tastes and social norms and expectations of the target culture is often key to success, as is the understanding of what the target readers already know and what needs to be further explained to them by the translator. Add to this the translator's own linguistic, moral, aesthetic and social preferences and norms influencing the target text and it is easy to understand Theo Hermans' statement that "[i]t would only be a mild exaggeration to claim that translations tell us more about those who translate and their clients than about the corresponding source text".⁷ Indeed, this insight shows us the dangers of uncritically treating translations as the source text, and lays bare the importance of the translator and the target culture to the translation outcome.

Whereas it might seem logical to suggest that the more translators deviate from

their source text, the more they could be criticized for this deviation, this path should generally be avoided. Indeed, despite arguing, as some do, that staying close to the source text should be the ethically right thing to do, and that translators should not be held responsible for being honest about the nature of the text they have translated, most translation scholars would emphasise that there is no key strategy for how translations “should” be carried out. In short, literary translation will always be tied to individual taste and personal preference. This is what makes translators more than merely copiers of the target text. However, the influence of these individual tastes and preferences goes far beyond the translator’s own desires, to include both the intended reader and the norms and expectations of the target culture to which they belong. The importance of these social and cultural considerations is never as evident as when the linguistic content or the subject matter of the source culture comes into conflict with the norms or expectations of the target culture.

To provide a case in point, this study will analyse four Swedish translations of Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).⁸ They have been selected based on their listing by the Royal Library in Stockholm as the four different translations published in Sweden in the last 35 years. Three of them, those published in 1987, 1992 and 2001, are republications of translations first published in 1943, 1936 and 1992 respectively, and the last one was first published in 2020.⁹ Through using central terms and concepts from the field of Translation Studies,¹⁰ I will compare these translations and their source text *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.¹¹ In so doing, I will demonstrate some of the many considerations a translator must often make. Moreover, I will discuss the many ethical concerns faced by the translator of a text whose norms clash with those of the target culture and demonstrate how these become even more complicated when the intended readers are young.

As it is generally accepted that translation is a very complex trade, focussing on the translation of an entire work and analysing only one or two of the aspects to be considered by the translator will not do justice to the aim of this article. Thus, in order to include as many aspects as possible, this article will focus on a wide range of different aspects relevant to the translation of one word only: the racist slur “nigger”, generally referred to as “the n-word”.¹² This is motivated by the word having been subject to much controversy for a long time, and because it lends itself to useful discussions on what it means to translate not only between two different languages and two different cultures, but also between two different times, and for different readers.

What Factors May Affect a Translation Outcome?

Before analysing the four translations, it is important to shed light on how a translation project is generally carried out, as well as how the four Swedish translations studied here differ from many other translations in that respect. Their special nature has to do with all being so-called *retranslations*. In short, a retranslation is a translation made into a language where there already exists at least one previous translation of the same work.¹³ This fact forces the translator of the retranslation to make considerations that would not normally have been made if no prior translations existed. Whereas “the retranslation hypothesis”, introduced by Antoine Berman,¹⁴ states that the first translation of a work tends to domesticate the target text more than is the case for the following retranslation(s), many scholars contest it, and the hypothesis has never been proved.¹⁵

One reason for making a retranslation is that texts often have what one might call a best-before date. In short, languages change over time, and words and grammatical structures become archaic, or their meaning or connotations change, which might call for an updated version, or maybe a translator or publisher simply believes that the previous translation is poor and could be improved. Yet another reason could be that certain words used at the time of the first translation (or at the time the source text was first published) have become associated with negative moral or aesthetic values, since the norms of the target culture also change over time. Thus, the entire point for retranslations is to deviate from translations (and retranslations) published previously, making previous (re)translations indirectly affect new retranslations. Naturally, however, prior translational solutions may, in situations where the source text is difficult to understand, offer direct help for retranslators.

Whereas the above aspects are specific to retranslations, there are general aspects to be taken into consideration by all translators of literature. Admittedly, translation outcomes are often affected by agents other than the translators themselves, by other so-called “*agents of translation*”,¹⁶ but while agents such as editors, proofreaders, publishers and so on often have a hand in the translation outcome, this article will primarily focus on the translation outcome itself, and relate it to the translator’s choices.

Before and while translating, translators must always ask themselves who are *the intended readers* of the target text, as this may have an impact on the translational choices made. If, for instance, *Huckleberry Finn* is to be translated to suit younger readers than the intended readers of the source text, this may affect the translator’s choice of vocabulary and sentence complexity. This is closely related to the *skopos* of the translation, a concept introduced by Hans J. Vermeer in the 1970s. The term refers to what the target text is meant to achieve, i.e., its purpose.¹⁷ For example, if the translation of *Huck-*

leberry Finn is to be read by mature readers as an example of the awful racism in the American South of the nineteenth century, then the n-word is likely to be retained by the translator, but if the *skopos* is instead to provide today's young readers with a great adventure tale, maybe the n-word would have to be replaced with a more neutral term, one that is more acceptable to modern readers.

While translating, the translator needs to consider other aspects as well. For instance, how the *reviewers* and *the public* would react to certain formulations is an important consideration as the translated text must sell. Here, having a good understanding of the norms and expectations of *the target culture* is central to a successful translation. As André Lefevere puts it, “[y]ou can, in theory, say anything you want. In practice, though, if you want to be listened to at all, you will have to say it within a certain margin”.¹⁸ This margin can be defined as the framework within which translators are able to operate relatively freely, but if they step outside this framework, the reception will likely be very negative. Thus, the translator's understanding of the *norms* and *expectations* of the target culture is key to success, and failure to take these into account, or not being able to fully grasp them, may have serious repercussions.

Yet another aspect central to the translation outcome is the translator's *habitus*, and with this, the concepts of *field* and *capital*. First coined by Aristotle,¹⁹ the term *habitus* was reintroduced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.²⁰ The concept may help us understand why some are successful in a social context, termed *field* by Bourdieu, and why some are not. In short, our *habitus* is something we inherit from history and internalize via family, schooling, friends and surrounding society. It is our understanding of what is considered beautiful and ugly, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical. It also concerns our understanding of what behaviour is socially acceptable or applauded and what is not. The human brain quickly learns the norms and expectations of the social field to which one belongs and internalizes these unwritten rules to the extent that they quickly become automatic. The effect of this is that we react instinctively when someone breaks these unwritten codes of conduct.

Nevertheless, members of any social field are never exactly the same, as there are always some aspects of our personal *habitus* that make us individuals and not clones. According to Bourdieu, the key to social success is either a shared *habitus* with those around us, a so-called *field habitus*, or at least an *understanding of* and *willingness to adapt to* the social norms and expectations of a certain field *habitus*. Failing in either will prevent social acceptance.

In order to strengthen one's chances of gaining a higher status in one's field, or retaining the same status, there are certain tools at one's disposal, in the form of different types of *capital*. All types of capital are connected to the way we portray ourselves, or wish to portray ourselves, to others to gain acceptance. *Cultural capital* is related to

what is considered good aesthetic taste by one's field. Thus, someone who wants to be accepted by those at a higher social level needs to consider things such as what music to listen to, what wine to drink, what paintings to hang on one's walls, what books to read, what authors to like, etc. Our *economic capital* has to do with the way we display our financial status. This could be done by driving an exclusive car or living in a luxurious house. *Social capital* has to do with our network of contacts, i.e., knowing the right people (friends, relatives, business contacts and so on) as a chance to boost our social status and thus our chances of success. Any combination of these forms of capital displayed to others is termed our *symbolic capital*.²¹

The need to display one's symbolic capital is often vital to a translator and often explains translational choices made. For instance, this could explain why many translators often try to "fix" a poorly written sentence in the source text, since their own readers will most likely not have seen the source text and will therefore deem the translator incompetent unless the text reads well in the target language. Thus, this is the translators' way of defending what might be called their *professional capital*. In parallel, when translators are set the task of translating words or ideas that go against the norms of the target culture, their personal habitus, or their understanding of the field habitus of the target culture, often forces them to protect their own capital by shying away from rendering formulations that would otherwise be associated with the translators' persona. This insight goes far beyond the traditional view of translation as simply conveying the same sentence in language two as was presented in language one.

Finally, whereas translators' personal habitus often concern their aesthetic values and ideals, their habitus may also be seen in their political ideologies. To present a theoretical example, one might say that a racist translator may be more tempted to retain the n-word in a translation of an old text than would be the case for translators wanting to show their readers that they are indeed not racist, and that their habitus is indeed in line with the norms of the target readers. This line of action is also likely to reinforce and possibly raise their own professional and social capital.

Huckleberry Finn:

Basic Plot, Reception and the use of the N-word

Twain's novel was first published in Britain in 1884, and then in the USA in 1885. Set in the 1830s or 1840s, the plot starts after the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) where Huckleberry Finn is a friend of Tom's. Upon its first publication, the official subtitle of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, was also "Tom Sawyer's Comrade". Told in the first person by Huck himself, the story starts in Missouri, in the town of St. Pe-

tersburg, which is another name for Hannibal, where Twain grew up.²² Here, Huck lives with the Widow Douglas, who is Huck's guardian since his father is both abusive and, generally, absent.

In short, the basic plot revolves around Huck, Tom and the Widow Douglas's slave Jim, whom the two boys help escape to Cairo, in the free state of Illinois. Their journey is an interesting mix of exciting boys' adventures in an almost Don Quixotian style on the one hand,²³ and an inner journey on the other. At first, affected by the "civilized" white norms Huck has learnt, he suffers from feelings of guilt by helping a runaway slave get away from his rightful owner. However, as time goes by, Jim proves himself to be more honourable and noble than his white "superiors", even more noble than Huck himself. Despite being brought up by the "civilized" norms of white society, Huck first develops a bad conscience that is later replaced by a deep respect for Jim. While learning about Jim's noble character, Huck, and the reader, is also exposed to some less pleasing aspects of white society. Thus, the journey along the river is also an inward journey towards greater insights into the darker aspects of human behaviour, seeming partly to pre-empt Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*. Towards the end, Huck is resolved to go against the norms he has been taught, deciding not to give Jim up to his white persecutors, stating: "All right, then, I'll go to hell".²⁴ Thus, here is a young boy who dares to challenge white society because he feels it is the right thing to do, even if it means he is doomed.²⁵

Of central importance to the novel is the word "nigger", appearing more than 200 times in the source text. Starting out as a word conveying notions of white supremacy and black inferiority, the word gains many more positive connotations towards the end of the novel, while the concept of the superior, honourable, and ethical nature of the word white slowly becomes more negative, like a nod to Anthony's oration, in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*.²⁶ The n-word appearing so many times, in contexts where white people use it to reinforce their own notion of superiority, could be a way to make even racist readers want to keep reading, as they would feel at home in the way black people are described. Then the trap slams shut, as they gradually realize that Jim is actually the most noble of all the characters, and that white society is not noble at all. In short, where the word honourable goes from having a positive connotation to a negative one in Anthony's oration, the n-word could be said to go the opposite way in Twain's novel. Thus, as the use of the n-word is central to Twain's power of persuasion, the translation of the n-word is also key to conveying Twain's persuasive powers.

As already stated, whereas *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1884, it is set in the 1830s or -40s, in Missouri, where Mark Twain grew up under his real name Samuel Clemens. The events take place some decades before the Civil War, and thus before the end of slavery.

The wealth of the South was dependent on slavery.²⁷ This could explain the need for white people to describe black people as inferior, since this would defend and maintain the status quo. Hence, using the n-word when talking both to and about black people could be a way to sustain and reinforce this view in society. Twain's way of changing the connotations of the n-word should thus be regarded in a wider context.

The frequency of the n-word is decidedly noteworthy. In their article on *Huckleberry Finn*, Matthew Fellion and Katherine Inglis ask why this is so, as at the time Twain completed the book, in the 1880s, "there was a distinct difference in usage between the older slur and what was, at the time, the more respectful term 'Negro'".²⁸ One explanation for this, I argue, is that the plot is not set in the 1880s, but some 40 to 50 years earlier, when the n-word was more frequently used and more generally accepted. Twain simply wants the language to be as realistic as possible, and as previously stated, the frequent use of the n-word is a conscious strategy through which Twain converts some of his readers, making them see both white and black people in a new light.

This brings us to the reception of Twain's novel. None of his published works met with as much reaction, either before or after publication, as *Huckleberry Finn*.²⁹ As might be expected, the first negative reaction was immediate, and involves the Concord Public Library in Massachusetts, whose board refused to have anything to do with it.³⁰ Here is a clear example of how censorship is not confined to literary production and publication only, but of how censorship may take place even after publication, by powers beyond the official censors.³¹ Twain, however, was not overly concerned about this negative reaction. Instead, he argued that this would give the book more attention, leading to more readers buying it. Not surprisingly, he was right, as the sales of the novel soared.³² In short, the library board trying to protect their own social and cultural capital by not wanting to be associated with the book could be said to have partly backfired. Still, several libraries banned the novel, but in the media, very little can be found in terms of critical reviews following the publication.³³ Lawrence Vogelback mentions finding only one, published in the *The Century Review*, which was generally positive, raising traits such as the novel's great humour and characterization.³⁴

According to Fellion and Inglis, "the early objections to *Huck Finn* came from several libraries and focused on its suitability for children or 'respectable people'".³⁵ Since then, much of the criticism of the novel over time has concerned racism. Firstly, there is the stereotypical characterization of Jim, in particular. Despite the novel's disclosing Jim's human dignity and friendly nature, this is done through racial stereotyping, where Jim is said to personify white prejudice about black people, especially since the younger Huck is portrayed as more adult and less gullible than his older friend Jim. Secondly, there is the repeated use of the n-word.³⁶

This criticism aside, as late as in the 1990s, the book “was required reading in three-quarters of US high schools”.³⁷ American teachers have defended the use of the novel in their teaching, for instance by claiming that “censorship undermines the creation of an informed citizenry able to make critical judgements about competing ideas”.³⁸ Since the 1990s, however, the novel has often been replaced by other works with less provocative content, and it is in this light we need to understand why NewSouth Books published a new edition in 2011, where the n-word had been replaced by the word “slave”, in an attempt to reintroduce the book on the high-school reading lists.³⁹

The Swedish Context

With the above in mind, let us turn to the Swedish context and the translator. We must acknowledge that the translator into Swedish must consider not only that time has passed since the first publication of the source text, but also that the text will be meeting modern readers in Sweden, whose history is different from that of the USA. Whereas slaves have also been part of Swedish history, they have not been as central to Sweden as they were to many Southern states between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, racism in Sweden was decidedly well spread in the nineteenth century, and the n-word, spelt exactly as in English, was used here as well, to address or refer to black people in a way that took white supremacy for granted.

Naturally, however, whereas the Swedish “neger” (negro) was long regarded a neutral term to describe black people, even those favouring it in contrast to the n-word could still be prejudiced.⁴⁰ This is made evident, for example, in *Åhlén & Åkerlunds konversationslexikon*, a Swedish encyclopaedia whose volume quoted here was published in 1928. Under the heading “negrer” (negroes), the following can be found: “intellectually and morally, negroes are decidedly of a lower standing than most other human races, but at the same time, they are happy and joyful and comparatively easy to handle”.⁴¹

Moreover, if one turns to *Svenska Akademiens ordbok*, the quoted post published in a volume from 1947, under the heading “neger”, the word “nigger” appears, described as a word used in contempt or in a jocular way. Moreover, the description of the plural “negrer” is also prejudiced, containing formulations about negroes being flat nosed and having thick lips, mentioning many uses of the word that show extreme prejudice. For instance, there is the definition of the word when used about people that are not actually black, explaining that people may still be called “neger” if their cultural or moral standpoints are similar to those of negroes, after which the synonyms “barbarian” and “savage” are provided.⁴² This display of racist views by such a prestigious dic-

tionary as *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* as late as in 1947 is not to be taken lightly, as it shows how few advances Sweden had made in this area by this time.

Today, however, the scene is decidedly different. The once-neutral word “neger”, historically the positive alternative to the derogatory n-word, is no longer considered politically correct, either in the USA or in Sweden. The USA has tried many alternative words to describe black people, such as “blacks”, “coloreds”, “Afro-Americans” and “African Americans”, but often, these words are soon considered tainted for one reason or another, and thus discarded. In Sweden, direct translations of the American words have been used, such as “svarta” (blacks), “färgade” (coloreds) and “afroamerikaner” (Afro-Americans).

In today’s USA and in Sweden, the awareness of the importance of avoiding racist or prejudiced language is so prevalent to most that the issue of how to talk about or address black people is highly sensitive. This is why one might be surprised, at first, when finding out that even the most recently published American editions of *Huckleberry Finn* tend to retain the n-word. After all, the book describes a dark time in American history, containing language that most people would rather not think of, let alone use. However, as opposed to the Swedish translations of the novel, the different American editions are not translations. This makes any changes made in these editions stand out much more clearly than is the case for a translation into a different language, and it opens up for a discussion on how far one is allowed to tamper with a source text, regardless of one’s good intentions. Thus, it is easy to understand why the decision in 2011 by NewSouth Books to replace all the n-words in *Huckleberry Finn* with the word “slave” sparked a lively debate on whether or not this was a laudable decision.

Whereas the n-word is generally not seen in print in Sweden today, unless, like here, when used as meta-language, there are still debates on the use of “neger”. In June 2011, for example, Nils Svensson wrote in *Språktidningen* (a periodical covering language matters) about some recent events concerning the possible replacement of the word “neger”. Svensson first retells how the publisher of the new edition of the book for young readers *Ture Sventon i Paris* planned to remove the word, but that this was stopped by the Swedish Authors’ Association (Svenska författarförbundet) as it would violate the author’s right to his own work, which sparked a debate. A comparison is also made with the decision a few years earlier to retain “neger” in Astrid Lindgren’s *Pippi Långstrump går ombord*. The solution there was to write a foreword describing the use of the word in Lindgren’s day and today, encouraging parents to discuss this with their children when reading the book.⁴³ Some years later, however, it was decided to remove the n-word, in favour of more neutral words.⁴⁴

Whereas Erik Löfroth mentions 15 different translations of *Huckleberry Finn* in his article from 1990 on the Swedish translations,⁴⁵ and I have identified two more since

then, I have found very little published in terms of the reception of these and their use or non-use of the n-word, despite its negative connotations. It must here be acknowledged that translations tend not to be reviewed as often as source-text publications. Maybe this is even more so when dealing with retranslations of a work already reviewed for the target-language readers. To the extent they can be found, modern reviews tend to focus on Twain's story rather than make comparisons with prior translations, again a sign of how translations are often treated as if they are the source text. However, the many different Swedish translations over the years speak of the novel's general popularity.

Huckleberry Finn: Genre and White Perspectives

Whenever literature for young readers is discussed, several different terms are employed. In *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators*, Göte Klingberg uses the term *children's literature* to also include teenagers.⁴⁶ Thus, he allows the term to comprise readers all the way up to the age of nineteen, at which time one verges on being an adult reader. Similar definitions are used by the other scholars brought up in this article.⁴⁷ Thus, as I estimate the readers of *Huckleberry Finn* to be anything from nine, ten years old and upwards, this article will also be oscillating between the terms "children's literature" and "literature for young readers" without making a great distinction between them. If a distinction between children and slightly older readers is required, this will be made clear.

Age is a very central issue in discussions around *Huckleberry Finn*. In *Kiddie Lit*, Clark provides a historical insight of relevance to this article. She notes that T.S. Eliot characterized *Huckleberry Finn* in 1950 by contrasting it with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, calling the latter a "boys' book" and the former "a book which boys enjoy" but one that "does not fall into the category of juvenile fiction".⁴⁸ Before Eliot's distinction in 1950, however, both books were treated as boys' books to be read by boys of any age, and they were often conflated by readers. Clark goes on to demonstrate that the reception of *Huckleberry Finn* over the years has been closely tied to "differences in thinking about children and children's literature".⁴⁹ Clark also mentions that whereas the early reception was indeed mixed, this mix was also representative of how the reviewers regarded the intended readers. If the reviews were positive, then the readers were seen to be both boys and adults. However, if the reviews were negative, then the reviewer had usually treated it as a children's book.⁵⁰ Thus, a way of defending the novel was to brand it adult literature.⁵¹

As of the 1950s, the novel had secured a place in the American literary canon, but

at the same time, the critique of the book started to change. Critics of the first half of the century had commended the novel for presenting a balanced view of slavery instead of simply raving at slavery and the notion of white supremacy. It becomes apparent that such comments come from white critics who still thought of slavery as something at least partly positive. When the criticism changed mid-century, black critics, such as Ralph Ellison, started criticizing Huck for being “too white”.⁵² Several issues were brought up, such as stereotyping, the frequency of the n-word, the childlike portrayal of Jim “and whether, in key interchanges, Twain is satirizing or reinforcing – effectively whitewashing – the racism of the status quo.”⁵³

This brings us to the discussion on for whom the novel is intended. Here, Clark states that even staunch critics of the novel would often allow it in colleges but not in high school, but that the more ambivalent critics tend to worry about whether young readers will be able to spot the irony of the novel’s way of treating slavery and white supremacy. Clark quotes Shelley Fisher Fishkin, who declared that at the end of the day, the book is a children’s book that teaches them to question both their parents and the laws of society, as well as official accounts of history.⁵⁴ This view would indicate that the book can be used as a pedagogical instrument to foster critically thinking adults as part of a democratic project. However, this hinges on whether adults believe young readers can see through the irony of the novel, or whether there is irony there to start with. If young readers are able to critically discuss whether or not the novel criticizes or whitewashes racism, then the novel would most likely have a place in the literary canon for young readers, argues Clark.

White Perspectives and Reader Reactions

It should be pointed out that much of the criticism surrounding *Huckleberry Finn* seems historically to be based on the assumption that the readers are always white, or a blindness to the fact that it is told from a white perspective. Clark provides some examples of this, such as the comment made by William Lyon Phelps in 1907, where he praises the novel for being balanced and also showing “the ‘beautiful’ side of slavery – for it had had a wonderfully beautiful, patriarchal side.”⁵⁵ That this perspective is decidedly white is evident.

Indeed, Twain was a white writer writing for white readers from a white perspective, but today, many readers will naturally be black, both in Sweden and the USA. Anyone interested in how black readers react to the novel may find Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* an interesting read, and another alternative is the 1992 publication of *Satire or Evasion? Black perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*.⁵⁶

The possibility of Swedish readers of any published literature identifying as black has naturally increased in Sweden over the past twenty-or-so years. Much Swedish research has recently been published on the topic of racism, whiteness and blackness. Interestingly, however, as pointed out by Tobias Hübinette, the entire issue of race is quite different in Sweden and the USA. In the USA, he argues, there is the notion of living in a post-racial society, which presumes the historical existence of a previous society where the matter of race was central. This explains, argues Hübinette, why the discourse in such societies still makes use of race as a concept, whereas Sweden rather distinguishes between “Swedes’ and ‘immigrants’”.⁵⁷ In Sweden, he continues, there is resistance against talking about or pursuing research into questions of race, but at the same time, there is a growing interest in “kritiska vithetsstudier” (critical whiteness studies).⁵⁸ As regards Sweden’s urge to be colourblind, Hübinette argues that this is based on the Swedish assumption that race is either a thing of the past or a phenomenon only relevant to English- or Spanish-speaking countries, and that this view may thus be said to have “saved” the self-respect of most European countries.⁵⁹

That there is Swedish sensitivity as regards racist views on blackness may be clearly illustrated by Oscar Pripp and Magnus Öhlander in their *Fallet Nogger Black – anti-rasimens gränser* from 2008, where they discuss the strong reactions ensuing the introduction of a new flavour of the popular ice cream Nogger.⁶⁰ In short, in 2005, the state-sponsored Centrum mot racism (CMR, Centre against Racism) reacted against the commercials for the new ice cream *Nogger Black*, which they claimed were racist. This was not only because the word “black” was part of the name but also because the word “Nogger” led one to think of the n-word, and because the graffiti-like text in the commercial led people to think of graffiti in black American communities rather than of children’s writing on asphalt, as was the intentional allusion according to the ice cream company, GB. CMR called for a boycott of GB.

Pripp and Öhlander have studied the heated media debate that followed upon the publication of the advertisement. In short, they conclude that many of the different opinions of the various agents can be explained by their different ways of defining racism. For instance, those criticizing CMR tended to define racism as something conscious, i.e., intentionally racist actions, whereas those defending CMR rather saw racism as a result of power structures in society, and argued that so-called “vardagsrasism” (everyday racism) may not be intentional but is still racist. Those defending CMR also argued that it is primarily those targeted or affected by an action that should decide whether it is to be considered racist or not. Yet another explanation for the strong reactions against CMR, argue Pripp and Öhlander, could be its threat to the national self-image of Sweden as a tolerant country.⁶¹

On the topic of unconscious racism, in her article on whitified underclass mascu-

linity in the novel *Chi-mo-ka-ma*, by Dan Andersson, Therese Svensson explains how white colonialism has enabled the unconscious notion among white people that being white equals being a human being.⁶² From a translator's point of view, then, the question is whether such an assumption in the target text should be conveyed in translation or not.

Given the above, yet another consideration to be made when translating *Huckleberry Finn* is whether or not the reader is or identifies as white or black (or neither). Will a black reader react differently from a white reader, and if so, will this affect the translation? Deciding whether the implied reader is white or black, young or old, or any combination of these will be a challenge to the modern Swedish translator.

Whereas much more could be said on the topic of whiteness, blackness and racist discourses in Sweden, these are only briefly brought up here, partly since three of the four translations studied here have been made at a time when the likelihood of the intended Swedish reader being or identifying as black was very small, and the heated debate on racism and whiteness is likely to primarily have concerned only Thompson in his translation from 2020 (see below).

Some Aspects on Translating Children's Literature

So far, literary translation has here been discussed from a rather general perspective. However, when it comes to children's literature, certain additional considerations come into play. Göte Klingberg presents some challenges and often contradictory considerations faced by translators of children's literature. He identifies four main pedagogical objectives. The first objective is to enable young readers to experience more literature. From a translational point of view, Klingberg thus draws the conclusion that "nothing less than what really could be said to be the original in translation should be presented".⁶³ Yet another objective which ought to prevent deletion or deviations from the source text, argues Klingberg, is "the aim of giving the readers knowledge, understanding and emotional experience of the foreign environment and culture, in order to further the international outlook".⁶⁴ However, the last two pedagogical objectives often clash with the first two, Klingberg states. The third objective is to ensure that the readers are given the chance to understand the text, and Klingberg here points out that it may often be more difficult for the young readers of the target culture to understand what is going on as they have a weaker understanding of the source culture than was the case for the source-culture reader. Such situations would indeed call for changes or deletions in the target text. The fourth pedagogical goal is to further "the development of the readers' set of values".⁶⁵ Klingberg here points out that in situations where the

cultural norms of the source culture clash with those of the target culture, the translator will see the need to make changes as well.

Considering the translation of children's or youth literature from a pedagogical perspective may also be linked to the concept of *the intended reader*. Whereas the intended reader of youth literature is often thought of as the young readers themselves, leading to the conclusion that the translator may have to make changes in order to cater to their understanding and interests, Klingberg points out that the values expressed in the source text may rather have to be related to the values of adults, and he mentions parents and teachers as examples of adults whose values must be considered.⁶⁶ This is an important insight, as adults wield much power in the selection of literature. Adults are represented throughout the entire chain of production, selection and, most often, purchasing of literature, in the form of booksellers, librarians, critics, teachers and parents. Not only will parents often select the reading material for young readers, but they are often present during the reading itself, sometimes reading the books out loud to their children. A translator failing to take the values and norms of these agents into account may see few copies sold and read.

It is in discussing the values of adults that Klingberg introduces the strategy he terms *purification*. He points out that this translation strategy is often criticized as well as defended. In short, “[i]ts aim is to get the target text in correspondence with the set of values of its readers – or rather in correspondence with the supposed set of values of those who feel themselves responsible for the upbringing of the intended readers [...]”.⁶⁷ Thus, this strategy has close connections with ideology, and it may concern anything from the way different cultures have different norms to the way different cultures assess what would frighten a young reader and not. Purification may be applied whenever adults could be expected to consider a situation unsuitable to young readers, or whenever a taboo word is used.

Many of the points made by Klingberg are also voiced by Maria Nikolajeva, who points out that sometimes, cultural norms and ways of seeing young readers may be so different that a text may be deselected for translation altogether, and that this often has to do with how different cultures define “child and childhood”.⁶⁸ One example of a book that has often been translated but significantly abridged, Nikolajeva states, is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. What has often taken place here is a case of *adaptation*, defined by Nikolajeva as a text subjected to adjustments that has been “adjusted to what the translator believes to be the needs of the target audience”.⁶⁹ In the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, Nikolajeva points out that the originally 500 pages have been reduced to only 24 pages in some adaptations. One important aspect put forward by Nikolajeva is that studies of adaptations “often yield interesting insights into the dominant views on childhood and children's literature”.⁷⁰

Whereas making a story more accessible to young readers is often achieved by shortening it, Nikolajeva points out that translations sometimes go the other way, in the form of additions, to make it clear to the readers why a character behaves in a certain way. This also opens up for the possibility to comment on the actions of certain characters, making the additions part of a pedagogical or ideological project. Sensitive language is often an issue that translators need to address in children's literature, such as when the discourse is considered sexist or racist.⁷¹

This brings us back to the pedagogical objectives in translations for children. As also mentioned by Klingberg above, Riitta Oittinen reminds us of how children's books cannot normally be read by children if they have not first been vetted by adults, which highlights the importance of considering adults as well as children when writing and translating literature for young readers.⁷² Oittinen also points out that translated books may change the status of a work, so that children's classics may become adult literature in translation and vice versa. As an indirect comment on Klingberg's discussion on the pedagogical reasons for giving children and young readers access to books, Oittinen also highlights how the different purposes of reading a text will influence the way a text is perceived by the reader. As an example, she uses Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, and argues that if the novel is read by students for an exam, they will be paying attention to things different from a situation where they would read for pleasure only.⁷³ Indeed, the intended use of a book will also be important to the way it is translated, and this may be connected to the concept of *skopos* brought up above.

Some Previous Studies on Translating *Huckleberry Finn*

A number of studies have been published on translating *Huckleberry Finn*, a few of which have a direct bearing on this article. One of these is Ronald Jenn's from 2021.⁷⁴ In the introduction to his study on French translations of the novel, Jenn states that several translations have coexisted, and that "the several different versions, publishing houses, and translators, compete for attention and readership."⁷⁵ The status of these translations is not only tied to their translational quality but to the status of the publishing house or whether or not they are part of a prominent book collection. The most interesting aspect may be found in the conclusion, where Jenn argues that the constant stream of new translations of the novel has contributed to an "overall improvement in the reception and understanding of *Huckleberry Finn* and Mark Twain in France."⁷⁶

Janko Trupej analyses the translation of the racist discourse in *Huckleberry Finn* in Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia) during the socialist period.⁷⁷ By studying two Slovenian translations, one from 1948 and the other from 1962, Trupej demonstrates how

the first translation deletes the n-word on several occasions, but often replaces it with even stronger racist alternatives. However, the target text from 1962 generally makes the text milder. Trupeji's conclusion is that the reason is political. In 1948, the new socialist Yugoslavia saw the opportunity to criticize the immoral American capitalist society by reinforcing Twain's racist slurs. Thus, the target text went against the norms of the target culture for political reasons. However, the country had distanced itself more from the USSR in 1962, allowing for a translation more in line with the norms of the target culture. This is a good example of how translators have power and agency, albeit, in this case, the decision to make this type of translational choice is just as likely to have come from the publisher or editor as a direct result of government interference.

Finally, Erik Löfroth, mentioned above, discusses all the different translations of *Huckleberry Finn* available in Swedish by 1990, analysing several translational aspects, such as abridged versions, deletions, cultural adaptations, censoring out vice and toning down cursing, to mention a few. There is also a discussion on racist language, albeit quite a short one, where Löfroth discusses attempts by different translators to tone it down, to be further discussed below. The general changes made by many of the Swedish translators are so great, according to Löfroth, that they alter Twain's source text "almost beyond recognition".⁷⁸

The Translations Analysed

Having thus contextualized the novel and discussed several aspects relevant to the translators' strategies, let us now turn to the translations themselves. The four translations to be analysed here – all entitled *Huckleberry Finns äventyr* – have been published or republished since 1987. Starting with the source text, the comparison will be chronological, based on when the translations were first published. It should be mentioned that all the four translations studied here have been listed as children's or youth literature by the Swedish Royal Library.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn contains 43 chapters in total.⁷⁹ In its different forms, I have found the n-word 213 times. The word "negro" only appears once, in Twain's discussing his use of different dialects in an explanatory text before the first chapter, where he speaks of "the Missouri negro dialect".⁸⁰ As different dialects are very difficult to transfer in translation, and none of the four translations studied here have tried to do so, this may explain why this explanatory text does not appear in the Swedish translations.

Johnsson's Translation (1936)

The first translation in this study was made by Harald Johnsson (1886–1936). In *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, Stefan Mählqvist writes Johnsson's biography.⁸¹ Mählqvist states Johnsson worked as an author and translator, and by the time of his death, he had published almost 80 titles, his translations not included. At the start, Johnsson primarily published cheap detective stories, and as a translator, he mainly came to translate detective fiction and adventure stories, similar to the genres in which he wrote. Mählqvist also mentions a clear breach of copyright in Johnsson's publication of a Swedish book that stayed much closer to the German original than Johnsson had indicated. Johnsson also used several pseudonyms as a translator, and was not unaccustomed to making cultural adaptations. Several of the titles he translated were made for Barnbiblioteket Saga (The Children's Library Saga).⁸² This was the case with *Huckleberry Finn*, thus clearly indicating that this translation was aimed at children and young people. Writing about Barnbiblioteket Saga, Lena Kåreland states that the aim of this book series, started in 1899, was "to give children access to good literature", and this aim "was well in tune with the culture radical impulses of the time [...]. Its parole was that only the best is good enough for children [via] texts written by 'real' authors".⁸³ Johnsson's translation from 1936 is included here as it was republished by Norstedts in 1992, then in the form of a revised version apparently made in 1957.⁸⁴

This study is concerned with the 1992 edition, which is only divided into 28 chapters, instead of the 43 chapters of the source text. Thus, several chapters have been omitted, shortened and merged. This makes it hard, sometimes, to decide whether the n-word was consciously deleted or if it was simply part of a passage deleted for other reasons. Nevertheless, a basic overview shows that the n-word, appearing both as a separate noun, such as "nigger" or "niggerer" (pl.), or in compounds such as "niggerhandlare" (nigger trader), occurs 70 times in the book, compared with the 213 times I have found in Twain's longer source text. 24 times, different forms of "neger" appear instead. In addition, there are two cases where the n-word has been transformed into the pronoun "honom" (him),⁸⁵ and once, the formulation "en svart gubbe" (a black old man) occurs.⁸⁶

I have only found four cases where the n-word has been clearly targeted for deletion,⁸⁷ i.e., it has not been part of a long passage that was deleted but is the only deleted word. On the whole, it is difficult to discern a clear translation strategy. For instance, the word "nigger trader" is first closely translated as "niggerhandlare" but later as "slavhandlare" (slave trader).⁸⁸ Additionally, until page 70, "neger" has not been used once, but as of this page, it seems to have become the first choice of the translator. However, 15 out of the 24 occurrences of the word appear on only four differ-

ent pages.⁸⁹ This leads to the question of whether Johnsson has had a clear strategy for when to replace the n-word with “neger” and when to retain it. Whereas one might think that “neger” would be used by Johnsson when a certain likeable character is talking, or only when the narrator is talking, and that he would reserve the n-word for the less likeable characters, this is not the case, making it harder to see a clear strategy.

In discussing reissued translations, Löfroth states that “they are really the products of an earlier period, and as such reflect its mores. However, if they had been found too objectionable, they would clearly not have been reissued.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Johnsson's translation was republished in 1992, in the Popular Classics series by the well-known publisher Norstedts. In this edition, there is no paratextual material on its status in relation to the source text. There is no mention of either the book's having been drastically shortened, with many famous adventures cut out, or a discussion on the book's partly retaining the n-word, why this decision was made or, given the novel's primary readers being young, a discussion on the history and problematic nature of the n-word.

Barthel's Translation (1943)

The next translation to be studied was first published in 1943, and the translator was Sven Barthel (1903–1991). In *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, Alan Asaid describes Barthel as both a translator and an author, who made a name for himself as an author skilled at the depiction of nature, especially of the Swedish archipelago.⁹¹ Barthel is also described as one of the founders of the popular book series “De odödliga ungdomsböckerna” (The Immortal Youth Books), published by the famous Swedish publisher Bonnier. He later became the editor of this series and translated three out of the almost eighty volumes in the series: Twain's *Tom Sawyers äventyr* and *Huckleberry Finns äventyr* and Alexandre Dumas' *De tre musketörerna* (The Three Musketeers).⁹² As a translator, Barthel primarily translated from English, staying within the genres of prose and drama, translating famous authors such as John Steinbeck, Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill, to mention only a few. Barthel became a well-acclaimed author and translator, and was awarded several prestigious prizes for both.⁹³

As indicated above, Barthel's translation from 1943 was first published in the Bonnier series “De odödliga ungdomsböckerna”, which is discussed by Ulf Boëthius. According to Boëthius, the series included translations of books such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.⁹⁴ According to Boëthius, the authors were predominantly male, with only nine of the altogether 34 authors being women. Most of the original works were written in English, and the series “primarily consisted of adventure books for boys.”⁹⁵ Boëthius also points out that Barthel's intention was to close the gap between youth

literature and adult literature, partly by breaking with the tradition of using translators from youth and children's literature in favour of employing translators from the field of adult literature. In closing, the article points out that "Barthel hardly widened the already existing canon in youth literature, but through his choice of translators and illustrators, he effectively contributed to giving youth literature a higher status".⁹⁶

The most recent publication of Barthel's translation took place in 1987, as part of the Bonnier series "Alla tiders klassiker" (The Classics of All Times), marketed and distributed by another famous publisher: Natur & Kultur. According to Kulturrådet (The Culture Council), a Swedish government authority, the series "Alla tiders klassiker" contains selected titles from all over the world. These titles are primarily suitable for upper-secondary school, and may be ordered free of charge by teachers aiming to use them for educational purposes.⁹⁷ In 1990, Löfroth describes Barthel's translation as "the only edition for children which is not an abridgement".⁹⁸ Thus, given Barthel's aim of closing the gap between youth literature and adult literature and his translation being the only unabridged one for children in 1987, "Alla tiders klassiker's" choice of his translation to be read in upper-secondary school is understandable.

As with Johnsson above, the n-word, in its different forms, has been retained in Barthel's translation, but here in 53 instances only. Since Barthel's translation is complete, this number is relatively much lower than Johnsson's, occurring only one-fourth of the times it appears in the source text. The n-word has most often been translated into different forms of "neger", found 132 times in Barthel's translation. Until halfway through the novel, the n-word and "neger" occur about as many times, after which there is suddenly a great increase in the use of "neger", at the expense of the n-word.

At times, solutions other than "neger" are found, but it is difficult to discern a clear strategy. For instance, "nigger trader" is first translated into "negerhandlare" (negro trader) and as "slavhandlare" (slave trader) the second time.⁹⁹ As this difference in translational choices is similar to the choices made by Johnsson above (first "niggerhandlare" and then "slavhandlare") one cannot help but wonder if Barthel has been influenced by Johnsson's prior translation. If so, this would both confirm and contradict the retranslation hypothesis. "Nigger" being turned into "neger" indicates a move away from a prior translation, choosing to domesticate more than the preceding translation, but the choice of "slavhandlare" in the second instance indicates the possible and direct influence of a prior translation, as previously mentioned, with the same one-time-only solution.

There are a few cases of the n-word having been replaced by the personal pronouns "han" or "honom" ("he" or "him").¹⁰⁰ Another solution is to provide Jim's name.¹⁰¹ However, what is more surprising is what happens towards the very end of the novel, when Huck, believed to be Tom, tries to spin Tom's uncle Silas a yarn about having

chased after Jim after his escape. In telling this lie, Huck says: “we got a canoe and took out after them and crossed over but couldn’t find nothing of them”.¹⁰² This is rendered by Barthel as follows: “vi [...] tog en kanot och satte efter dom, men vi såg inte skymten av nån *nigger*” (we [...] took a canoe and went after them, but we couldn’t get a glimpse of any *nigger*).¹⁰³ This is noteworthy as Barthel seems to have wanted to reduce the many instances of the n-word found in the novel, but here, the word is added. Thus, Barthel here further reinforces the racist discourse of the source text. In theory, this could be the result of the source text having been a different edition from the first one, but those I have been able to check with have all been in line with the source text.

As with Johnsson’s translation, there is no paratext explaining Barthel’s translation strategies, such as his replacement of the n-word with the word “neger”, most of the times, or a discussion aimed at his young readers on the problematic nature of the n-word.

Swahn’s Translation (1992)

The third translation was made by Sven Christer Swahn (1933–2005), fondly described by John-Henri Holmberg in *Svenskt översättarlexikon*.¹⁰⁴ Holmberg describes Swahn as both an author and a translator never confined to any one genre. After securing a Bachelor of Arts in Lund, Swahn went on to get his PhD in literature. However, it is as an author and translator he is most famous. Holmberg describes his authorship as one ranging from poetry, via children’s and youth literature, ghost stories and science-fiction literature to realistic and surrealistic short stories, and a long range of adult novels. Swahn’s career as a translator, says Holmberg, covered very similar genres, including translations of anything from the science-fiction author Philip K. Dick to Shakespeare’s sonnets, and he translated classics by Emily Dickinson, John Keats, Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain. Holmberg concludes by claiming that Swahn was not afraid of diverging more from the source text than his peers, rather interpreting than purely transferring the text.

Swahn’s translation of *Huckleberry Finn* was first published by Klassikerförlaget Niloé, part of the publishing group Rabén & Sjögren, in 1992. The novel is listed under “Klassiska äventyrsböcker” (Classic Adventure Books), together with translations of novels such as James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. It here appears as part of the publisher Rabén & Sjögren’s classics series, 2001, together with the same titles as those above. Just as with Barthel’s translation, Swahn’s is also unabridged, and in translating the n-word, the target text shows greater consistency than the previous two. In short, the n-word has completely disappeared, and in most cases it has been replaced

with the word “neger” in different forms. “Neger” occurs no fewer than 176 times, but on three occasions, it has been added when there was no n-word in the source text.¹⁰⁵ On five occasions, the n-word has been completely deleted.¹⁰⁶ In the other cases where the n-word appears in the source text, the solution has been to replace it with another word completely. For instance, the personal pronouns “han” or “honom” have replaced it on seven occasions.¹⁰⁷ In three instances, the word has been replaced by a proper name.¹⁰⁸ The word “nigger trader” has been translated as “slavhandlare” (slave trader) both times,¹⁰⁹ and on the whole, it appears that the target text has followed a relatively consistent pattern, where the n-word has been translated as “neger” about four-fifths of the times it appears in the source text.

Swahn’s afterword is traditional, in the sense that he first discusses the place where the novel is set, then makes the connection to Twain’s own growing up in the area, whereupon there is a biographical description of Twain’s life and his writing. After this follows a description of Huck as a boy who has grown up, just like Twain, with slaves all around, and how the greatness in his decision to go against the norms of white society and free Jim can only be understood in this light.¹¹⁰ Towards the end, Swahn describes his decision to stay close to the source text, for instance by retaining archaic words. He then states that Twain never refrains from depicting things the way they really are, and that as a translator, he has tried to follow suit.¹¹¹ As the most central archaic word in the source text is the n-word, used very deliberately by Twain, and given Swahn’s reasoning above, his refraining from commenting on its absence in his target text is noteworthy.

Thompson’s Translation (2020)

Finally, there is Erik Thompson’s translation, published by the relatively small publisher Sjösalas förlag in 2020. It has been difficult to find much information on Thompson as a translator, most likely as a result of his rather short career so far. Nevertheless, running a Google search, typing in “Erik Thompson översättare” renders some hits on translated works, such as a selection of ten novels by Edgar Allan Poe, translated together with Daniel Martinez in 2018, a 2018 translation of *Martin Luther King, Jr: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, with King as the credited author, a translation of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* from 2021 and a translation of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of Baskervilles*, from 2020. Of special interest here is the translation of Martin Luther King, as one might here guess a thematic link to *Huckleberry Finn*.

There are a few more titles translated by Thompson, all published by Sjösalas förlag AB. On their homepage, Sjösalas förlag describe themselves: “We publish current social debate with a focus on issues of justice, new editions of classics that must never be

forgotten, biographies and new fantastic fiction”.¹¹² They also list the so-far 16 titles of their classics series “Klassikerbiblioteket”, where *Huckleberry Finn* can be seen together with translations of Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, to mention a few. A quick glance at the titles shows a mix of adventure books for young people and what would rather qualify as adult literature.¹¹³ Sjösalas förlag officially focussing on issues of justice is interesting, as this could have a bearing on the selection of both King’s book and Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*.

Thompson has been the most consistent of the four Swedish translators in his strategies regarding the n-word, which occurs nowhere, whereas the word “neger” is found no fewer than 202 times, in one form or another. The n-word has been deleted with no replacement on only three occasions,¹¹⁴ and the word *nigger trader* appears as “slavhandlare” both times, in line with Swahn’s translation above.¹¹⁵ The personal pronoun “honom” has replaced the n-word on two occasions,¹¹⁶ and once, the word has been replaced with the personal name “Nat”.¹¹⁷

What makes Thompson’s translation especially interesting is his foreword, entitled “Mark Twain och Huckleberry Finn. Den litterära radikalen, hans främsta skapelse och n-ordet” (Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn. The Literary Radical, His Most Accomplished Creation and the N-word). There is first a discussion on the connection between Twain and his characters, the writing of the work and its American reception, where many were first shocked by the immoral plot in the story. Then follows a discussion of the n-word, here in my translation:

In accordance with the language used in the depicted epoch, black people are referred to as “niggers”, even by themselves (usually translated as “negroes” in Swedish editions, this one not exempted). A formulation that naturally feels particularly awkward to modern readers, and in recent years there have been attempts made (but as far as I know not outside the USA) to revise the text and insert a less charged word in place of the above-mentioned one, such as “slave” [...]. In this case with a confusing result, for reasons that anyone who has just read *Huckleberry Finn* can easily realize.¹¹⁸

From there, Thompson is quick to point out that he

choose[s] not to brush aside such initiatives with scornful talk about “political correctness”, since “politically correct” is an expression solely used by assholes who feel offended by being treated as assholes when they act like assholes.¹¹⁹

However, Thompson adds, the problem of trying to modernize the novel in this way is both linguistic – in that he can see no neutral translation of the n-word – and because such a translational choice, even if it were possible, would

undermine the very message in the book. The strength in its social criticism lies, decidedly, in the inverted presentation, that the point of departure of the characters is explicitly that racism with its structures and jargon is justifiable and natural. Indeed, Huck's loyalty to Jim, that he would literally rather burn in hell than betray a friend, becomes so much more gripping by Huck taking this as a sign of his being a *bad* human being.¹²⁰

After this follows another discussion that reveals many of the aspects Thompson has had to consider before translating. He states that whether or not the novel should be considered offensive today is a question to be answered by black people instead of white people who, "as usual, tell them what they should find offensive and what not".¹²¹ Although he admits that his research has been somewhat superficial, Thompson here mentions that he has googled "every named critic of the language in the book", only to find that they are all "white Americans".¹²² Indeed, Thompson would have found some contradictory black views in works such as the 1992 publication of *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*.¹²³ However, we should bear in mind that the n-word has most often been retained in the American editions, despite the history of black slavery being one closer to home there.

Be that as it may, Thompson points out that for his time, Twain was extremely progressive and radical in his view of black people, providing several examples of this. The discussion concludes by Thompson stating that "if [...] Twain had lived today, he would probably have been regarded as the very embodiment of a so-called PC (politically correct) leftist".¹²⁴

Translated Passages Compared

Having thus analysed and discussed some general traits of the four Swedish target texts, and before a discussion commences, I will first demonstrate how three specific passages have been rendered in the four Swedish translations. They have been selected since all of them contain examples of how white people regard or talk about black people, and as the choices of how to translate the n-word are very central to the way the situation is perceived.

The first passage takes place at the very beginning of the novel. The slave Jim has fallen asleep under a tree, and Tom has decided to play a trick on him by removing his hat and hanging it on a branch above him. Upon waking and finding his hat hanging from the branch, Jim believes he has been bewitched and taken for a ride across the state, only to be returned to the tree by the witches in the end. Every time he retells the story, the ride grows in length, until he has travelled around the world. Twain writes:

Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other *niggers*. *Niggers* would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any *nigger* in that country. Strange *niggers* would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. *Niggers* is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire [...].¹²⁵

What is particularly striking in this short passage, besides its stereotypical rendering of black people, is the high density of the n-word. A translator conveying this passage at a time when the word is even more undesirable than in Twain's day will likely find it extra challenging, making it suitable for analysis. It is noteworthy that in Johnsson's translation, only the first sentence of this passage has been retained, but it should also be noted that the n-word has been retained here.

Jim var riktigt högfärdig över sitt äventyr, och till slut ville han knappt se åt de andra *niggererna*. *Niggerer* kom miljals för att höra Jim berätta om det, och han var mer respekterad än någon annan *nigger* i den trakten. Främmande *niggerer* brukade stå med munnen öppen och betrakta honom noga, precis som om han var ett underverk. *Niggerer* pratar alltid om häxor i mörkret vid lägerelden [...].¹²⁶

(Jim was really proud of his adventure, and finally he hardly wanted to look at the other *niggers*. *Niggers* would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any *nigger* in that country. Strange *niggers* would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. *Niggers* is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire [...].)

Barthel's translation from 1943 looks quite different here:

Jim var omåttligt stolt över sitt äventyr, och till sist ville han knappt se åt de andra *niggererna*. Han blev den berömdaste *negern* i hela trakten, det kom främmande *negrer* resande miljals ifrån för att höra honom berätta, och *de* stod där med gapande munnar och såg upp till honom som till ett underverk. När *niggerer* sitter tillsammans kring brasan i skymningen, pratar de alltid om häxor och trolldom [...].¹²⁷

(Jim was incredibly proud of his adventure and eventually, he hardly wanted to look at the other *niggers*. He became the most famous *negro* in the whole area, strange *negroes* came travelling from miles afar to hear him tell his story, and *they* stood there, their mouths open, and looked up to him as to a wonder. When *niggers* sit together around the campfire at dusk, they always talk about witches and witchcraft [...].)

It can be clearly seen that the strategy applied by Barthel is a mix of retaining the n-word and replacing it with "neger". It is difficult to discern a pattern as regards in what situations Barthel retains the n-word and in what situations he replaces it. It is likely that his strategy is simply to reduce the total number of n-words in his translation, in

line with the fact that the fourth n-word in this passage has been replaced with the pronoun “de” (they). In total, out of the five n-words in the source text, two have been retained in the target text, two have been replaced by “neger” and one has been replaced by a pronoun.

In Swahn’s target text from 1992, the main strategy has been to replace the n-word with “neger”, four times, and once, it is replaced by the pronoun “de”, but as opposed to Barthel’s translation, this concerns not the fourth but the second n-word.

Jim var fruktansvärt stolt över det och blev så högfärdig att han knappt ville se åt de andra *negrerna*. De brukade färdas milavis för att få höra Jim berätta om det och han blev mer respekterad än någon *neger* i hela trakten. Främmande *negrer* brukade stå och stirra på honom med gapande mun som om han var en sorts vidunder. *Negrer* brukar alltid sitta och prata om häxor i skymningen vid spisen [...].¹²⁸

(Jim was terribly proud of it and became so proud that he hardly wanted to look at the other *negroes*. They used to travel miles to hear Jim talk about it and he became more respected than any *negro* in the entire area. Strange *negroes* used to stand and stare at him with their mouths open as if he was a kind of wonder. *Negroes* often sit talking about witches at dusk by the stove [...].)

This brings us to Thompson’s translation from 2020. Thompson’s strategy is evident in this passage, as all the five n-words have been replaced by “neger”. Thus, whereas Barthel and Swahn have both shown that there are different ways of avoiding the n-word, Thompson has consistently chosen to replace n-word with “neger” on the one hand, but on the other hand, to stay as close as possible to the source text in other respects, possibly with the exception of the change of paragraphs after the first sentence:

Jim var kolossalt högfärdig över detta, och han blev så högfärdig att han knappt ville se åt de andra *negrerna*.

Det kom *negrer* miltals ifrån för att höra Jim berätta historien, och han blev mer ansedd än någon annan *neger* i hela landet. Främmande *negrer* blev stående med gapande munnar och synade honom från topp till tå, som om han hade varit ett underverk. *Negrer* ska alltid prata om häxor i mörkret framför brasan i köket [...].¹²⁹

(Jim was tremendously proud about this, and he became so proud that he hardly wanted to look at the other *negroes*.)

Negroes came from miles away to hear Jim tell his story, and he became more respected than any other *negro* in the whole country. Strange *negroes* would stand with their mouths open and closely regard him up and down, as if he had been a wonder. *Negroes* always want to talk about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire [...].)

The second scene is one where Huck has just played a trick on Jim by pretending that his disappearance on the river is something Jim must have dreamt, and that the event never really took place. After being put straight by Jim, Huck states the following:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a *nigger*; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards neither.¹³⁰

The use of the pejorative n-word is central here in that it highlights the extent to which Huck is embarrassed, making him feel the need to apologize despite Jim's low social status. This is rendered as follows in the Swedish translations, hereafter presented together, in chronological order:

Det dröjde en hel kvart, innan jag kunde förmå mig att be *niggern* om förlåtelse, men jag gjorde det i alla fall, och det ångrade jag aldrig efteråt.¹³¹

(It took all of fifteen minutes, before I could make myself to ask the *nigger* for forgiveness, but I did it at least, and I never regretted it afterwards.) (Twain/Johnsson)

Men ändå tog det närapå en kvart, innan jag kunde förmå mig till att be en *neger* om förlåtelse – men jag gjorde det i alla fall till slut, och det behövde jag aldrig ångra.¹³²

(But still it took almost fifteen minutes before I could make myself ask a *negro* for forgiveness – but I did it anyway in the end, and I never had to regret it.) (Twain/Barthel)

Det tog en kvart innan jag kunde få mig att gå in och be en *neger* om ursäkt så där, men jag gjorde det i alla fall och det var jag inte ledsen för efteråt [...].¹³³

(It took fifteen minutes before I could make myself go in and ask a *negro* for forgiveness like that, but I did it anyway and I wasn't sorry for it afterwards [...].) (Twain/Swahn)

Det tog femton minuter innan jag kunde förmå mig att gå och be en *neger* om förlåtelse. Men jag gjorde det, och vad mera är, jag har aldrig ångrat det en enda sekund.¹³⁴

(It took fifteen minutes before I could make myself go and ask a *negro* for forgiveness. But I did it, and what's more, I have never regretted it one single second.) (Twain/Thompson)

Evidently, only Johnsson's translation from 1936 retains the n-word, whereas the three that follow have all opted for "neger" instead. Löfroth argues that Johnsson's changing "a nigger" into "the nigger" means "removing the racial aspect".¹³⁵ However, I would argue that it only weakens it, the word "nigger" itself carrying a decidedly racist bias. The three other translations opting for "neger" instead is also a way of reducing the power of this scene, especially in Barthel's translation, as "neger" was considered a neutral alternative to the n-word in 1943, but slightly less so in Swahn's 1992 translation. In 2020, I would argue that "neger" was just as inappropriate to contemporary readers as the n-word was in 1936, and it may thus be seen as spurring the same reaction in the 2020 reader.

In the third scene chosen for a closer analysis, Huck has just met Tom's aunt Sally, who has mistaken him for Tom. In playing along, Huck needs to come up with a credible explanation for his boat's late arrival, stating that a cylinder-head had blown out on the boat. Aunt Sally responds by exclaiming "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"¹³⁶ after which the following exchange takes place:

"No'm. Killed a *nigger*."

"Well, it's lucky, because sometimes people do get hurt."¹³⁷

By making the made-up victim a black person, Huck uses his understanding of the prevalent white racism and correctly guesses that no more questions will be asked if he offers up a black victim. He is proved right by Aunt Sally's response, which indicates that she does not see black people as human beings, thus spurring a reaction in the reader. This passage is translated as follows:

"Nej, bara en *nigger* strök med."

"Nåja, det var ju väl. [för ibland blir folk skadade.]"¹³⁸

("No, just a *nigger* got killed.")

"Well, that's a relief, for sure. ~~because sometimes people do get hurt.~~" (Twain/Johnsson)

"Nej – bara en *neger* blev dödad."

"Nå, gudskelov för det – det brukar kunna gå illa ibland."¹³⁹

("No, just a *negro* was killed.")

"Well, God be praised for that, it often ends badly sometimes." (Twain/Barthel)

"Nej frun. Det var bara en *neger* som strök med."

"Det var väl tur! För ibland kan folk råka illa ut."¹⁴⁰

("No ma'am. It was only a *negro* that got killed.")

"Well that's fortunate! Because sometimes people can get hurt." (Twain/Swahn)

"Nej frun. Bara en *neger* som blev dödad."

"Nå, det var väl för väl, för ibland kommer folk till skada vid sådana tillfällen."¹⁴¹

("No ma'am. Just a *negro* who was killed.")

"Well, that's a relief, because sometimes people get hurt on such occasions." (Twain/Thompson)

In Johnsson's translation, we can see that on the one hand, the n-word has been retained, but on the other, "because sometimes people get hurt" has been deleted, which reduces the shock effect. One possible reason for this might be found in this translation being an abridged version, indicating that the intended readers may be rather young. Since the omitted passage is a case of irony, which is often lost on young readers, this omission is understandable. Whereas "neger", used in the other three translations, has gone from an accepted term in 1943 to an unacceptable one in 2020, I ar-

gue that this does not have a great impact on, or does not drastically change how, this passage is perceived over time, as the reader is solely focussed on the awful racism displayed by Aunt Sally not seeing black people – whatever they are called – as human beings, making her unconcerned about the death of a black person. However, it should also be noted that Barthel has changed “because sometimes people get hurt” into “it often ends badly sometimes”. This translation slightly reduces the reader’s understanding of Aunt Sally’s racism.

Discussion

It is evident that in relation to the target text, the four Swedish translations deviate in their treatment of the n-word. The two oldest, Johnsson’s from 1936 and Barthel’s from 1943, have partly retained the n-word but often replaced it with the word “neger”. Sometimes, the word has been rewritten in other ways, into pronouns, proper names or other nouns altogether. Thus, active decisions to rewrite the text have been made. Whereas simply deleting the n-word, with no alternative offered, has not been a common strategy, the overall effect in these two translations is that the number of n-words used has been reduced. Swahn’s 1992 translation, however, has consistently replaced the n-word, most often opting for “neger” instead, but also choosing other solutions. The translation showing the greatest consistency in translating the n-word is Thompson’s from 2020, which replaces it with “neger” with very few exceptions.

Let us now discuss the translational outcomes by employing the different terms and aspects presented above. They will be brought up thematically, and related to the four translations in a primarily chronological order.

We will first investigate the concept of *skopos* in relation to the four Swedish translations. By studying the nature of the series in which the four translations were published, it is evident that all four translations share a similar *skopos*: to translate “good” literature for children. Johnsson’s translation being first published as part of Barnbiblioteket Saga, whose aim can be summed up as publishing good literature by real authors, decidedly falls into this category, and Johnsson’s abridged translation could also be seen as a result of his primary readers being children unable to understand all the cultural references and the ironic aspects of the source text. The fact that Johnsson does not even mention that his work has been abridged, nor does any paratextual material, could be seen as an indication of his intended reader being young enough not to consider such things important, but this would then overlook the selection process often carried out by adults. Barthel’s translation being part of the Bonnier series “De odödliga ungdomsböckerna” would indicate a similar *skopos* to that of Johnsson, but with a slight difference. Given

Barthel's being one of the founders of the book series, with a clear intention of closing the gap between youth literature and adult literature, thus employing translators from adult literature instead of children's literature, it is evident that Barthel's primary readers are slightly older than in Johnsson's case, supported also by this being the first unabridged translation for children. Swahn's translation from 1992 – first published by Niloé and later by Rabén & Sjögren in their classics series, together with many youth literature classics, such as *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Jungle Book* – is also clearly regarded by the publisher as a classic in youth literature. That Swahn has also considered that these works are often selected and sometimes also read by adults is hinted at in his afterword, which discusses the literary qualities of the work, its reception in Sweden and Twain's biography and use of language. When it comes to Thompson's translation, it is interesting to note that Sjösalas förlag describe themselves as publishers of current social debate, focussing on issues such as social justice. If we are to see their publication of *Huckleberry Finn* as a logical consequence of this, then the pedagogical aims of publishing children's literature, such as the wish to pass on to our children a desirable set of values, would be met if there is the assumption that the readers are able to understand the ironic aspects of the work. It is also apparent from Thompson's foreword, to be returned to shortly, that he knows that some of his readers will be adults.

As regards the strategies of *foreignization* and *domestication* and the use of the n-word, we can see how both Johnsson and Barthel have retained the n-word in several instances, despite its generally negative connotations in the target culture at the time, which could be regarded as a case of foreignization, i.e., staying close to the source text despite the possibility of conflicting norms with the target culture. However, to various degrees, all four translators have generally been trying to domesticate their translation of the n-word, primarily by replacing it with the more neutral word "neger". Most likely, this has been done by Johnsson, Bartel and Swahn as "neger" would remain within Lefevere's margin of what was culturally acceptable. As demonstrated above, "neger" was considered a neutral or at least culturally acceptable term when Johnsson and Bartel translated. Even though one might argue that the word was less favourable when Swahn translated, the fact that the translated text was from a different time, combined with there being no natural and culturally acceptable alternative to "neger", makes this word a logical choice for Swahn. Thus, one might argue that there is an element of *cultural adaptation* in the first three translations. However, in Thompson's case, Lefevere's margin has become even narrower than before, now also excluding the word "neger", which has put him in a tricky position. This would explain Thompson's feeling the need to address his use of "neger" in the foreword.

In short, then, it has transpired that as regards the use of the n-word, all four translators have tried to make use of domestication in order to better meet the values and

norms of their respective target culture. Thus, the discussions below will be in line with the assumption that domestication is the primary aim of all four translators.

Let us next consider the fact that all four works are *retranslations*, and recall the reasons for retranslations being made, such as the sense that a text feels antiquated or that there is the belief that a better or more culturally compatible translation could be made. Indeed, this could explain why some of the translations were published. Whereas we have not studied the (re)translations prior to Johnsson's (re)translation from 1936, remembering Löfroth's description of Barthel's translation from 1943 as the first unabridged translation for children could certainly explain the reasons for Barthel's translation. We have also seen how the word "nigger trader" was translated differently both times it appeared, both Johnsson and Barthel opting for "slavhandlare" (slave trader) the second time, which could be seen as Barthel's translation making use of the translational choice of a prior translation, but we can also see how Barthel's translation into "negerhandlare", as opposed to Johnsson's "niggerhandlare", is a case of *domestication via purification* on Barthel's side. As the republication in 1987, in "Alla tiders klassiker", could be ordered for free by teachers for use in class, one might draw the conclusion that the n-word appearing 53 times was not seen as an obstacle, possibly as the text was seen as a historical text. Nevertheless, as the 53 instances of the n-word used in Barthel's translation do not comply with the social norms of 1987, making Barthel's text seem dated to those readers, it is easy to understand why Swahn's translation may have come about, even more so as Barthel's translation from 1943 was the only unabridged translation for children before Swahn set out to change this. Whereas neither Swahn nor Thompson comments on the reasons for their translations being made, it is noteworthy that despite the fact that "neger" is only clearly socially unacceptable when Thompson translates, it is in his translation that the word appears most often, despite prior translations having shown that there are sometimes other viable options.

Turning to the sociological concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *norms*, it is evident that these have played a role in some of the translational choices studied here. If we first consider the field habitus, the norms, of the target culture at the time of translation, we may conclude that in the 1930s and 1940s the n-word, albeit considered pejorative, could still be used without attracting too many negative reactions, although both Johnsson and Barthel seem to have wanted to reduce the great number of n-words. This conclusion can be drawn from the assumption that both Johnsson and Barthel had an understanding of the norms of the target culture, and is also supported by both translations being republished later on. This is also how we are to understand Hermans' argument that "[i]t would only be a mild exaggeration to claim that translations tell us more about those who translate and their clients than about the corresponding source text".¹⁴² In short, by studying the translational choices in target texts

and comparing them with their respective source text, any deviations may reveal the translators' personal habitus as well as their understanding of the norms, or field habitus, of the target culture for which they operate. If so, then Swahn's and Thompson's completely avoiding the n-word would also be an indication of the norms of the target culture having further developed over time, thus affecting both translators. Their own habitus has most likely been formed by the culture in which they grew up, helping them stay within Lefevere's margin. This is evidently so for Thompson, whose understanding of the associations of "neger" having changed compels him to write a foreword where he defends his choice. As for Swahn, it should again be pointed out that whereas he officially declares his goal to stay as close as possible to the source text, he does not comment on the fact that the most central of all the words, the n-word, has been completely removed, in favour of "neger" or other wordings. Possibly, not seeing any reason to comment on this could also be connected to Swahn's understanding of the target culture, and that such a translational choice was simply taken for granted in 1992, but at the same time, this is when Johnsson's translation with the n-word partly retained was considered re-publishable. Finally, Thompson's own habitus and his so far having translated a limited number of books, one of these being the biography on Martin Luther King, may indicate a personal interest in issues of racism. If so, one may understand Thompson's concern, even on a personal level, of not having a neutral alternative to the n-word or "negro" to turn to. Admittedly, as indicated above, this interest could have come from the publisher rather than the translator himself.

As regards the *intended readers* and their impact on a translational outcome, *Huckleberry Finn* is generally treated as literature for children or young readers, as discussed by Clark. Scholars such as Klingberg, Oittinen and Nikolajeva show how this further complicates the matter, as literature for young readers must also suit the norms and values of adult readers, since these normally select the literature. This understanding is closely connected to Klingberg's four main objectives for children's literature: on the one hand, the translator must consider the goals of enabling young readers to experience more literature and to provide more knowledge and understanding, as well as the experience of other cultures via an international perspective, which would normally call for a close translation. On the other hand, trying to ensure that the readers understand the text and that the text conveys values that adult readers would like young readers to have would rather call for deviations from the source text.

In this light, it is apparent that Johnsson's attempt at reducing the number of n-words could be seen as a sign of aligning himself more with the supposed values of the adult readers of his time, while at the same time trying to stay close to the source text. Johnsson making an abridged translation, thus deleting formulations such as the ironic aspects of Aunt Sally's not seeing black people as human beings, could also be a case of

adaptation and *purification*, where children may be deemed unable to understand the irony, whereupon the values they were meant to internalize might even become the opposite to those intended. If so, this would explain Johnsson's deletion of this passage. Moreover, if Johnsson's prime aim is to tell a good adventure story to young readers rather than present the novel as a literary masterpiece, with references to source-culture phenomena that the young Swedish readers are deemed unable to understand, abridging the text and reducing the number of n-words could be seen as a natural choice. As for Barthel, we already know that his intention was to blur the boundaries between children's and adult literature. Nevertheless, Barthel's oscillating between the n-word and "neger" several times in the passage discussed above could be said to convey conflicting messages about the desired white values to be conveyed to children, especially as both words are used interchangeably by the same narrator in Barthel's translation. Nevertheless, as is decidedly the case with Swahn, Barthel has *adapted* and *purified* his translation, most often opting for "neger".

In addition to the intended reader being both young and adult, there is also the question of whether or not the reader is necessarily white. Again, this likelihood must be considered great in both Johnsson's and Barthel's translations, but also in Swahn's. Thus, if domestication was the aim of the translators, no extra considerations would have had to be made to avoid negative reactions among black readers. However, when we finally turn to Thompson's intended reader, something has changed. This reader, be it an adult or a child, is not only expected to shun the n-word but also "neger", as opposed to the previous translations, but the likelihood of the intended reader being or identifying as black is also decidedly greater in 2020, with possible additional repercussions for Thompson's translational choices.

It transpires that Thompson's challenge is more complex than is the case for the other three translators. For Thompson, not only has his only alternative translation turned into a taboo word, and there is the greater likelihood of his reader being black, but there is also a heightened sensitivity to racist language in his target culture, one that was not there when Swahn wrote his translation in 1992. By being aware of the way in which what some would consider improper language may create a virtual storm in the social media, by remembering the previous debates on the use of "negro" in books such as those about Ture Sventon and Pippi Långstrump and the strong reactions surrounding the ice cream Nogger Black, Thompson obviously knows he needs to tread carefully when translating *Huckleberry Finn*. Interestingly, there is a clear connection in Thompson's argumentation and one of the arguments of the defenders of Centrum mot rasism in the case of Nogger Black, namely the notion that it should primarily be those targeted by a certain action that should decide whether it is to be considered racist or not.¹⁴³ By stating that he has googled every named critic of the use of language in

Huckleberry Finn, finding all of them to be white Americans,¹⁴⁴ Thompson could be said to defend his choice to use “neger” by arguing that white people are likely those reacting the most, but that it is the voices of black people that matter.

Thompson’s foreword must also be related to his need to defend his *professional and social capital*, in short, his *symbolic capital*. Moreover, it can be seen as a direct result of how his own translational choice partly clashes with his own *habitus*. Whereas this concern is not likely to have been as great for his three predecessors, who have all been able to more easily adapt their alternative translations of the n-word to meet the norms of the target readers, Thompson must be careful not to upset readers and critics. Indeed, it is not in his interest to be known as a translator that perpetuates racist discourses. It is in this light that we should also consider Thompson’s strong reaction to those criticizing translational attempts such as “slaves” for the n-word as being too politically correct. By calling them “assholes” not once but several times, Thompson defends his own capital by clearly showing that he is indeed not racist but that his translational choices are limited. Another way of making sure that there is no doubt about his honest, non-racist, intentions is Thompson’s writing at length on the use of the n-word, stating that the formulation “naturally feels particularly uncomfortable to modern readers.”¹⁴⁵ Moreover, by defending Mark Twain as someone that would have been considered a politically correct leftist had he lived today, Thompson also defends his own capital, and it may here be suitable to also quote Thompson’s parting words in his foreword, here in my translation:

Expressed differently, I believe there will come a day when a person of dark complexion can read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in its original form, without having to flinch at the word “nigger”, because racial prejudice, by that time, really *is* history and not some ubiquitous background radiation in this person’s life. When that day comes, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* will transcend from a democratic proclamation with tragically enduring relevance to being “only” a magnificent literary classic.

May that day come soon.¹⁴⁶

Thus, given Thompson’s making his own standpoints so clear on the matter of racism, his concern for his own capital is apparent, and he takes several steps to protect it. This also means that the intended readers of Thompson’s foreword are not readers pursuing racist ideas, but readers who see racism as a serious problem not only in Twain’s day but also in contemporary society. Put differently, Thompson’s own *habitus* is in line with the generally accepted norms of the target culture, and he does what he can to make this clear.

In this context, some final general points should be made. Even when the translator may shun a word such as the n-word, simply replacing it with a more neutral one is not

as straightforward as one might think. On the one hand, how much is the intended reader aware of the social norms of the source culture? What if a reader of Swahn's translation is aware of the use of the n-word in Twain's day? As it is now, only Thompson discusses this word, and explains its absence, but Swahn does not. This means that any readers of Swahn's translation who are aware of the use of the n-word in Twain's day, but who do not find it in the Swedish target text, will meet a text that appears to them as less provocative than the unchanged source text does to today's American readers. It simply will not present white people from the South as quite as racist as they come across in the source text.

On the other hand, given how the connotations of words shift over time, a modern and young Swedish reader less familiar with the nineteenth-century use of the n-word and its pejorative connotations might meet the same level of provocation in the word "neger" as met the readers of the n-word in Twain's day. If so, maybe Swahn's and Thompson's translations could be said to have achieved the same effect on some of today's readers. Thus, the decision to go either way may hinge on the identity of the intended reader.

Concluding Remarks and Implications

This article has shown that any contemporary translator of the n-word will need to juggle many conflicting considerations, only to find that there are very few translational options. Moreover, as many of the arguments for or against a particular translational choice stem from different moral standpoints, all laudable in their own way, this leads to yet another question not yet brought up – one that is difficult to answer but important to highlight: *What is the most ethical translation of the n-word for a contemporary translator?* On the one hand, we have the concept of *voluntary servitude*, of the aim of many translators being to stay as close as possible to the source text. On the other hand, in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, this is made extra difficult by how this strategy will clash with the pedagogical aims for publishing children's literature for contemporary readers.

Moreover, as a counterweight to the translators' choice of cultural adaptation this article has so far primarily taken for granted, we should also consider the ethical implications of actually retaining the n-word. In Twain's case, we have seen how the n-word has an important role to play in his literary strategy, possibly even calling for the retention of the n-word whenever the intended Swedish reader has a literary interest and is well informed. However, the word is translated for a different culture in a different time, and is indeed undesirable in the target culture, to be read by young readers meant to inter-

nalize a desirable set of norms. Even if “neger” becomes the primary translation strategy in an ethically motivated attempt to tone down a racist discourse, such a translator could still be accused of adopting an unethical strategy, not because “neger” is an undesirable word and not only in relation to Twain’s right to his own work but also from a very different perspective. Would not removing the n-word from the target text risk whitewashing history by portraying racism in Twain’s day as less racist than was actually the case? This would possibly be an undesirable strategy for any reader, regardless of colour. Moreover, as Klingberg points out, one of the aims of children’s literature is to give “the readers knowledge, understanding and emotional experience of the foreign environment and culture, in order to further the international outlook”.¹⁴⁷ In this light, would not choosing “neger” for the n-word go against such an objective? Possibly, to quote Anders Ekström in *Sydvenska Dagbladet* on the censorship of the word “neger” in *Ture Sventon i Paris*: “[t]o poke in a work of fiction because humankind has made progress since the book was written is, on the whole, exactly what the Ministry of Truth did in George Orwell’s *1984*”.¹⁴⁸ This gives food for thought. For instance, should we consider adding a bikini to the painting of a naked woman by Goya, simply because it may otherwise be seen as the objectification of women? In short, should we take the moral high ground and make changes to a work of art written by an author in another time and culture with very different values, simply because we and our target readers now have different values? Maybe we should be careful about being too judgemental about the way people in history have regarded or spoken about certain issues, as we are likely to find some of our own views and values rather embarrassing thirty years from now.

These ways of considering taboo words and how to translate them add to the understanding of the many different views and interests to be considered by the translator of sensitive words or ideas, and demonstrate why it may be impossible to satisfy all interested parties. This is especially so in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, where the intended readers may be both young and adult, of any colour, and possess knowledge of the source culture or be completely ignorant of the racist language used to reinforce white supremacy in the American South in the 1800s.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Cecilia Alvstad, “The Translation Pact”, *Language and Literature*, 23, 2014:3, p. 270–284; Christina Gullin, *Översättarens röst*, Lund 1998, p. 250.
- 2 Daniel Simeoni, quoted in Jeremy Munday & Jacob Blakesley, “Poetry Translation: Agents, Actors, Networks, Contexts”, *Translation and Literature*, 2016:25, p. 1–9, quotation p. 2.

- 3 Francis R. Jones, "Partisanship or Loyalty? Seeking Textual Traces of Poetry Translators' Ideologies", *Translation and Literature*, 2016:25, p. 58–83, reference p. 60.
- 4 Outi Paloposki, "Domestication and Foreignization", in *Handbook of Translation Studies. Vol. 2*, eds. Yves Gambier & Luc van Doorslaer, Amsterdam 2011, p. 40–42.
- 5 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed., London [1995] 2008, p. 15.
- 6 Paloposki 2011, p. 30–42.
- 7 Theo Hermans, "Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-Oriented Approaches Explained", in *Translation Theories Explained*, ed. Anthony Pym, Manchester 1999, quotation p. 95.
- 8 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, London 1884.
- 9 Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finns äventyr*, transl. Harald Johnsson, Stockholm [1936] 1992. Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finns äventyr*, transl. Sven Barthel, Stockholm [1943] 1987. Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finns äventyr*, transl. Sven Christer Swahn, Stockholm [1992] 2001.
- Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finns äventyr*, transl. Erik Thompson, Stockholm 2020.
- 10 See e.g. Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, London & New York 2016.
- 11 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, London [1884] 1908. It is theoretically possible that the Swedish translations have used different editions of the source text, but as they all claim to be translations of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, I am using the same source text for comparison. The original 1884 translation having been difficult to obtain in paper format, I have used the Kindle edition stated as the 1884 original and then compared it with a printed edition from 1908, which I use as my official source text as it contains page numbers, as opposed to the Kindle edition. In the cases brought up here, I have seen no differences between the 1884 version and the one from 1908.
- 12 In this article, "the n-word" is solely used for the derogative racist slur "nigger". Whereas many people today also use it to represent the once-neutral "neger" (negro), this is not done here.
- 13 Antoine Berman, "La Retraduction comme espace de traduction", *Palimpsestes* 1990:4, p. 1–7.
- 14 See Outi Paloposki & Kaisa Koskinen, "A Thousand and One Translations: Revisiting "re-translation", in *Claims, Changes and Challenges in Translation Studies*, eds. Gyde Hansen, Kirsten Malmkjaer & Daniel Gile, Amsterdam & Philadelphia 2004, p. 27–38, reference p. 27.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 John Milton & Paul Bandia, "Introduction: Agents of Translation and Translation Studies", in *Agents of Translation* (Benjamins Translation Library 81), eds. John Milton & Paul Bandia, Amsterdam & Philadelphia 2009, p. 1–18. Cf. Hanne Jansen & Anna Wegener, "Multiple Translatorship", in *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation: 1. Collaborative Relationships between Authors, Translators, and Performers*, eds. Hanne Jansen & Anna Wegener, Montréal 2013, p. 1–39.

- 17 Munday 2016, p. 126–130.
- 18 André Lefevere, “Translations and Other Ways in Which One Literature Refracts Another”, *Symposium*, 38, London & New York 1984:2, p. 127–142, reference p. 128. See also Carol O’Sullivan, “Translation within the Margin: The ‘Libraries’ of Henry Bohn”, in Milton & Bandia 2009, p. 107–129, reference p. 113 f.
- 19 Reine Meylaerts, “Translators and (Their) Norms”, in *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies: Investigations in Homage to Gideon Toury* (Benjamins Translation Library 75), eds. Anthony Pym, Miriam Schlesinger & Daniel Simeoni, Amsterdam 2008, p. 91–102, reference p. 93.
- 20 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, transl. by R. Nice, Cambridge [1972] 1977, reference p. 72–95.
- 21 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. R. Nice, New York [1984] 2009, original edition 1979, reference p. 12, 79. See also Bourdieu [1972] 1977, p. 171–183 and Lars Liljegren, *The Taming of a Viking: August Strindberg, Translation and Victorian Censorship*, Linköping 2018, p. 23.
- 22 Erik Thompson, “Mark Twain och Huckleberry Finn. Den litterära radikalen, hans främsta skapelse och n-ordet”, in *Huckleberry Finns äventyr*, by Mark Twain, transl. Erik Thompson, Stockholm 2020, p. 9–13, reference p. 9.
- 23 Matthew Fellion & Katherine Inglis, “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”, in *Censored. A Literary History of Subversion and Control*, by Matthew Fellion & Katherine Inglis, Chicago 2017, p. 115–126, reference p. 119.
- 24 Twain [1884] 1908, p. 321.
- 25 Cf. Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 118
- 26 Act III, scene II.
- 27 Cf. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619–1877*, New York 2003, reference p. 89.
- 28 Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 120.
- 29 Lawrence Vogelback, “The Publication and Reception of *Huckleberry Finn* in America”, *American Literature*, 11, 1939:11, p. 260–272, quotation p. 260.
- 30 James S. Leonard & Thomas A. Tenney, “The Controversy over *Huckleberry Finn*”, in *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, eds. James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney & Thadious M. Davis, Durham & London 1992, pp. 1–11, reference p. 2.; Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 117.
- 31 Cf. Liljegren 2018, p. 200.
- 32 Cf. Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 118; Vogelback 1939, p. 264.
- 33 Cf. Vogelback 1939, p. 264.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 264.
- 35 Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 118.
- 36 Cf. Fellion and Inglis 2017, p. 120.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 121. See also Beverly Lyon Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children’s Literature in America*, Baltimore & London, 2003, p. 78 f.
- 38 Allen Carey-Webb, “Racism and *Huckleberry Finn*: Censorship, Dialogue and Change”, *The English Journal*, 82, 1993:7, p. 22–34, quotation p. 23.

- 39 Hugh H. Davis, "On Teaching *Huckleberry Finn*", *Mark Twain Journal*, 54, 2016:2, p. 60–70; Fellion & Inglis 2017, p. 123.
- 40 I will constantly provide translations into English, including backtranslations, within brackets.
- 41 *Åblén & Åkerlunds konversationslexikon*, Vol. XV, Stockholm 2008, p. 13. My translation. "I intellektuellt o. moraliskt hänseende stå N. avgjort lägre än de flesta andra människoraser, men samtidigt äro de glada o. godlynta o. jämförelsevis lätthanterliga".
- 42 SAOB online, s.v. "neger", <https://www.saob.se/artikel/?seek=neger&pz=1> (3.5.2022). "om person som icke tillhör negerrasen, men som i fråga om sinnelag, kulturell l. moralisk ståndpunkt o.d. liknar l. anse(tt)s likna negrerna: 'barbar', 'vilde'".
- 43 Nils Svensson, "Historien om när det svarta ordet skulle bytas ut", *Språktidningen*, juni 2011, p. 25–27.
- 44 Nina Svanberg, "N-ordet tas bort ur nya Pippi", *SVT Nyheter* 15.2.2015, <https://www.svt.se/kultur/bok/n-ordet-tas-bort-ur-nya-pippi> (18.11.2022).
- 45 Erik Löfroth, "Huck, for Short; or One Hundred Years of Solicitude", *Studia Neophilologica*, LXII, 1990:1, p. 61–77, reference p. 63. Löfroth mentions 15 translators, some of whose translations have also been revised, resulting is around 50 texts in total (p. 61). I have found two more translators since 1990: Swahn 1992 and Thompson 2020.
- 46 Göte Klingberg, *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translators*, Lund 1986, p. 9.
- 47 E.g. Clark 2003.
- 48 Clark 2003, p. 77.
- 49 Ibid., p. 78.
- 50 Ibid., p. 83 f.
- 51 Ibid., p. 87.
- 52 Ibid., p. 97.
- 53 Ibid., p. 98.
- 54 Ibid., p. 99.
- 55 Ibid., p. 97.
- 56 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, Mass. & London 1992; Leonard, Tenney & Davis 1992.
- 57 Tobias Hübinette, "Den färgblinda antirasismen slår tillbaka", *Ras och vithet: Svenska rasrelationer igår och idag*, ed. Tobias Hübinette, Lund 2017, p. 237–251. My translation, quotation p. 238.
- 58 Ibid., p. 238.
- 59 Ibid., p. 242.
- 60 Oscar Pripp & Magnus Öhlander, *Fallet Nogger Black: Antirasismens gränser*, Stockholm 2008.
- 61 Ibid., p. 69–97.
- 62 Therese Svensson, "Vita män på gränsen. Om vitifierad underklassmaskulinitet i Dan Anderssons roman *Chi-mo-ka-ma*", i Hübinette 2017, p. 139–156.
- 63 Klingberg 1986, p. 12.
- 64 Ibid.

- 65 Ibid., p. 10.
- 66 Ibid., p. 12. See also Riitta Oittinen, “No Innocent Act: On the Ethics of translating for Children”, in *Children’s Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies*, eds. Jan Van Coillie & Walter P. Vershueren, Manchester 2006, p. 35.
- 67 Klingberg 1986, p. 58.
- 68 Maria Nikolajeva, “Translation and Crosscultural Reception”, in *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, eds. Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coast, Patricia Enciso & Christine A. Jenkins, London 2011, p. 405.
- 69 Ibid., p. 408.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., p. 409. See also Klingberg 1986, p. 12.
- 72 Riitta Oittinen, “No Innocent Act: On the Ethics of translating for Children”, *Children’s Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies*, Manchester 2006, p. 404–416, reference p. 35 f.
- 73 Ibid., p. 38.
- 74 Ronald Jenn, “Translations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in France”, *Journal of Translational American Studies*, 12, 2021:2, p. 47–69.
- 75 Ibid., p. 47.
- 76 Ibid., p. 62.
- 77 Janko Trupej, “Translating Racist Discourse in Slovenia during the Socialist Period: Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*”, in *Translation and the Reconfiguration of Power Relations: Revisiting Role and context of Translation and Interpreting*, eds. Beatrice Fischer & Mathilde Nisbeth Jensen, Vienna & Berlin, 2012, p. 91–107.
- 78 Löfroth 1990, p. 75.
- 79 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, London [1884] 1908.
- 80 Twain [1884] 1908, p. viii.
- 81 Stefan Mählqvist, “Harald Johnsson, 1886–1936”, *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, https://litteraturbanken.se/oversattarlexikon/artiklar/Harald_Johnsson (13.10.2022).
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Lena Kåreland, “Barnbiblioteket Saga”, *Lärarnas historia*, https://lararnashistoria.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Barnbiblioteket%20Saga_o.pdf (31.10.2022). My translation.
- 84 Löfroth 1990, p. 62.
- 85 Twain/Johnsson [1936] 1992, p. 44, 154.
- 86 Ibid., p. 91
- 87 Ibid., p. 74, 80, 159, 167.
- 88 Ibid., p. 36, 120.
- 89 Ibid., p. 88 (3 times), p. 120 (3 times), p. 143 (4 times), p. 177 (5 times).
- 90 Löfroth 1990, p. 61.
- 91 Alan Asaid, “Sven Barthel, 1903–1991”, *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, https://litteraturbanken.se/oversattarlexikon/artiklar/Sven_Barthel (13.10.2022).
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- 93 Ibid.

- 94 Ulf Boëthius, "De odödliga ungdomsböckerna", *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, [https://litteraturbanken.se/oversattarlexikon/artiklar/De_ododliga_ungdomsböckerna](https://litteraturbanken.se/oversattarlexikon/artiklar/De_ododliga_ungdomsbockerna) (13.10.2022).
- 95 Ibid. My translation.
- 96 Ibid. My translation.
- 97 Kulturrådet, s.v. "Alla tiders klassiker", <https://www.kulturradet.se/i-fokus/lasframjande/alla-tiders-klassiker/> (31.10.2022).
- 98 Löfroth 1990, p. 62.
- 99 Twain/Barthel [1943] 1987, p. 52, 203.
- 100 E.g. *ibid.*, p. 262, 263, 305, 212.
- 101 *Ibid.* p. 53, 318.
- 102 Twain [1884] 1908, p. 416.
- 103 Twain/Barthel [1943] 1987, p. 304. My Italics.
- 104 John-Henri Holmberg, "Sven Christer Swahn, 1933–2005", *Svenskt översättarlexikon*, https://litteraturbanken.se/oversattarlexikon/artiklar/Sven_Christer_Swahn (13.10.2022).
- 105 Twain/Swahn [1992] 2001, p. 216, 240, 283.
- 106 *Ibid.*, p. 118, 216, 217, 253, 267.
- 107 *Ibid.*, p. 51, 86, 95, 221, 241, 288, 289.
- 108 *Ibid.*, p. 48, 253, 272.
- 109 *Ibid.*, p. 49, 186.
- 110 *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- 111 *Ibid.*, p. 301.
- 112 Sjöswala förlag, "Välkommen till Sjöswala förlag", *Sjöswala förlag*, <https://www.sjoswalaforlag.se/> (1.11.2022). My translation.
- 113 Sjöswala förlag, "Klassikerbiblioteket", *Sjöswala förlag*, <https://www.sjoswalaforlag.se/klassikerbiblioteket-23955707>. (1.11.2022).
- 114 Twain/Thompson 2020, p. 329, 352, 365.
- 115 *Ibid.*, p. 69, 249.
- 116 *Ibid.*, p. 89, 315.
- 117 *Ibid.*, p. 329.
- 118 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 119 *Ibid.* Thompson uses the word "skitstövlar" for his opponents.
- 120 *Ibid.*
- 121 *Ibid.*
- 122 *Ibid.*
- 123 Leonard, Tenney & Davis 1992, e.g. Wallace, p. 16–24; Bell, p. 124–140 and Lester, p. 199–207.
- 124 Twain/Thompson 2020, p. 13.
- 125 Twain [1884] 1908, p. 10. My italics.
- 126 Twain/Johnsson [1936] 1992, p. 9. My italics.
- 127 Twain/Barthel [1943] 1987, p. 12 f. My Italics.
- 128 Twain/Swahn [1992] 2001, p. 12. My italics.
- 129 Twain/Thompson 2020, p. 23. My italics.

- 130 Twain [1884] 1908, p. 133. My italics.
131 Twain/Johnsson [1936] 1992, p. 63. My italics.
132 Twain/Barthel [1943] 1987, p. 96. My italics.
133 Twain/Swahn [1992] 2001, p. 92. My italics.
134 Twain/Thompson 2020, p. 127. My italics.
135 Löfroth 1990, p. 71.
136 Twain [1884] 1908, p. 332.
137 Ibid. My italics.
138 Twain/Johnsson [1936] 1992, p. 144. My italics.
139 Twain/Barthel [1943] 1987, p. 243. My italics.
140 Twain/Swahn [1992] 2001, p. 225. My italics.
141 Twain/Thompson 2020, p. 296. My italics.
142 Hermans 1999, p. 95.
143 Pripp & Öhlander 2008, p. 94 f.
144 Thompson 2020, p. 11.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid., p. 13.
147 Ibid.
148 In Svensson 2011, p. 26. My transl.

ABSTRACT

Lars Liljegren, Department of Culture and Society, Linköping University

The Intended Reader and the Translator's Capital: Cultural and Social Sensitivity When Translating "the N-word" in *Huckleberry Finn*

Many readers of literary translations undoubtedly understand that more than merely linguistic aspects must be considered in translation. Indeed, understanding the norms and expectations of the target culture is especially essential to any translator aiming for a successful reception, particularly when the subject matter, or a certain linguistic use, in the source text is incompatible with the social or cultural norms of the target culture. To demonstrate just how sensitive the translator of literature needs to be to sociocultural norms and values, I will compare the four most recently published Swedish translations of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and their translation of the so-called "n-word". I will demonstrate that whatever translational strategy is adopted, translators must consider aspects such as the intended reader, the different cultures and times involved, the changing connotations of words and, not least, their own social and professional capital.

Keywords: translation, n-word, habitus, intended reader, Mark Twain