

**From *Loquaimat* to *Munchies***  
**Cultural Erasure in the Translation of Emirati Children's Literature**  
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Khawla R. Binfahd and Sanaa Benmessaoud  
*University of Sharjah, UAE*

Sharif Alghazo  
*University of Sharjah, UAE*  
*The University of Jordan, Jordan*

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**Abstract:** Despite the growing body of scholarship on the translation of children's literature from English into Arabic, little attention has been given to the translation of Arabic children's literature into English. To address this gap, this article examines the English translation of Emirati children's book *حين يشتهي الجمل اللقيمات*, by Maitha Al Khayat, published as *When a Camel Gets the Munchies*. Drawing on Venuti's ethics of difference and Newmark's categorization of culture-specific items (CSIs), the study investigates the strategies used in the translation of Emirati CSIs in the source text and assesses the implications of these strategies for cross-cultural engagement. The analysis revealed an overwhelmingly domesticating approach that produced a more readable and playful target text, but resulted in an over-sanitized translation that significantly flattens Emirati cultural difference. It also exposed an underlying "child image" whereby the Anglo-American child reader is assumed to lack cultural curiosity and only enjoy familiar frames of reference. The article concludes that while readability is necessary in children's literature, a translation that embraces an ethics of difference by resisting homogenizing pressures and preserving cultural specificity is more conducive to cross-cultural engagement and to a richer learning experience for child readers.

**Keywords:** children's literature, Emirati culture, ethics of difference, translation

## **1. Introduction**

Children's literature is generally understood as books written for children, for both entertainment and didactic purposes. Hunt (1994: 4), however, asserts that children's literature "is vastly more complicated than that". He (2001: 2) argues that the very combination of the terms "children" and "literature" makes for a contradiction since what constitutes the literariness of literature "cannot be sustained either by books designed for an audience of limited experience, knowledge, skill and sophistication, or by the readers [of these books]". He thus proposes a more flexible designation, i.e., "texts for children", with "texts" encompassing "virtually any form of communication", including diaries and television series. Another broad definition comes from Oittinen (1993:11), who defines children's literature as "literature read silently by children and aloud to

children". It is therefore frequently multimodal, combining text with illustrations and sound. It is also often didactic as it is "arguably impossible for a children's book [...] not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology" (Hunt 1994: 3).

Because of these characteristics, the translation of children's literature presents unique linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges, and raises several issues, including style, pedagogical effectiveness, multimodality, and cultural representation. It also becomes even more challenging when the distance between the source and target languages is great and when the translated literature is peripheral, as is the case of Arabic children's literature. However, while there is a growing body of research on the translation of children's literature from English to Arabic (Mdallel 2003; Abdelhaq 2006; Dukmak 2012), there is comparatively little research on the English translation of Arabic children's literature, especially literature hailing from Gulf countries, such as the UAE.

To address this gap, this article investigates one of the biggest challenges in the translation of children's literature, namely culture-specific items (CSIs) in Emirati children's literature. It raises three key questions: how are Emirati CSIs translated into English for young English readers? To what extent does this translation contribute to, or otherwise undermine, cross-cultural engagement? And, finally, what are the implications of such a translation mode for the translation of children's literature from the periphery? To answer these questions, the article analyzes a children's book titled *حين يشتهي الجمال اللقيمات* (2012), authored by Emirati writer Maitha Al Khayat, and its English translation entitled *When a Camel Gets the Munchies* (2019). The analysis draws on Venuti's (1998, 2018) ethics of difference, and adopts Newmark's (1988) categorization of CSIs, and Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy of translation strategies.

## 2. Literature review

Linking the conventional literary system to the traditional family structure, Hunt (2003: 2) argues that children's literature is at the bottom of this system, trailing after women's literature, itself secondary to the dominant male adult literature. Over the past three decades, however, research on children's literature has increased, underscoring a growing awareness of its importance and complexity. As Hunt (2003: 1) aptly puts it, this literature is "an amorphous, ambiguous creature; its relationship to its audience is difficult; its relationship to the rest of literature, problematic". Much of this scholarly engagement has come from within translation studies, where this subfield is still "relatively young" (Borodo and Diaz-Cintas 2025: 2).

The translation of children's literature attracted the attention of some of the earliest scholars in the field, notably Göte Klingberg. Klingberg (1986: 7) decries the peripheral status of translation for children and propose a roadmap for translators of children's literature that shows them "good and bad solutions". He (1986:85-86) thus warns against translators' intervention, advancing that the target text (TT) "should not be easier or more difficult to read, be more or less interesting, and so on". Addressing cultural differences, Klingberg (1986: 56) distinguishes

between localization, i.e., domestication of the text for the target readers, and anti-localization, i.e., producing a TT that preserves the foreign nature of the source text (ST) in order to maintain the didactic function of children's literature. He further distinguishes between two processes in the translation of children's literature: purification and modernization. The former refers to the sanitization of cultural values to adapt the ST to target-culture (TC) values and norms. The latter refers to the process of adapting the ST to modern times. However, Klinberg (1986:65) maintains that purification "is in conflict with one of the aims of translation, i.e., to internationalize the concepts of the young readers".

Oittinen's work was another significant contribution to this subfield. She (2000: 5-6) maintains that translating children's literature is a difficult process that navigates several challenges. First, children's literature oftentimes makes heavy use of illustrations and is meant to be read aloud. The second challenge lies in translators' "own ideologies, which here means: their child images", which inform translators' decisions when they are translating for children (p. 5). Authority is another thorny issue: while children's literature is written primarily for children, it is the adults that ultimately control its production, translation, and publication (p. 69). Unlike Klingberg, however, Oittinen (2000) does not propose any roadmap. She simply encourages translators to apply their approach "knowingly and consistently" (p. 91), focus on the purpose of the translation, which is "to function alongside the illustrations and on the aloud reader's tongue", and maintain text-image coherence in the case of picturebooks (p. 69). Indeed, Oittinen (2003: 130) warns translators that these books are "iconotexts", i.e., texts where "the verbal and the visual are woven into one entity". This "unique relationship" is oftentimes one of "congruency" as illustrations "show the activity described, doubling or paralleling what is said in words" (p. 130). They do that by providing information about "place, culture, society as well as characters and their relationships" (p. 131). Oittinen urges translators to attend to "this totality of the verbal and the visual" (p. 132).

Emphasizing the complexity of children's literature, O'Sullivan (2019: 16) argues that across its diverse genres and audiences, this literature is always shaped by power differentials since it is addressed to children but mediated by adults. Due to this inequality in terms of "command of language, experience of the world, and literary knowledge," children's literature is perceived as literature that has to adapt to children's capabilities (p. 18). This drive to adapt is paradoxical. As she (2005: 1) rightly explains, since World War II, there has been a growing belief that children's literature could bring about "a Utopian 'universal republic of childhood'" thanks to its ability to bridge cultural divides and to familiarize children with foreign cultures. Drawing on Venuti, O'Sullivan (2019: 18) warns, however, that "it is exactly these foreign elements that are often eradicated from translations heavily adapted to their target culture, or 'domesticated'". This results in what she calls elsewhere "nanny translations" (O'Sullivan 2025: 311), i.e., translations that underestimate child readers' ability to understand foreign concepts.

O'Sullivan does not recommend any translation methods, either. Besides condemning the flattening of cultural difference in "nanny translations," and

encouraging translators who opt for a domesticating translation to adapt both the verbal and the visual to the target culture (2005: 99), she draws attention to the “manipulations” occurring in children’s literature. These manipulations are due either to state censorship for political reasons or to translators’ self-censorship in response to “perceived norms” (O’Sullivan 2019: 19). The latter include linguistic norms dictating what is appropriate for use; norms of characterization governing appropriate character behavior; physicality norms determining what part of the body can be illustrated; and content norms dictating which topics and values, including those related to religion and sexuality, are acceptable for children (p. 19-20).

Giving credence to O’Sullivan, Van Coillie (2020: 142) maintains that the translation of children’s literature has the potential to introduce new genres and styles and to offer “an alternative view of the world that challenges dominant ideas, stereotypes, norms or values”. However, he warns that while translation plays a critical role in cultural exchange, “globalization and commercialization [...] dominate the translation market for children’s literature”, which contributes to a significant imbalance in the flow of translations worldwide (2020: 143). For instance, international bestsellers can considerably impoverish local literature which raises the very legitimate question of whether translated children’s literature might constrain diversity rather than foster it. Such imbalance also raises questions about the status of translated children’s literature in the periphery, the modes of translation and circulation of such texts in the center, and the visibility of children’s literature coming from peripheral markets, such as the Arab one.

According to Mdallel (2003: 300), children’s literature is a relatively new genre in the Arabic literary polysystem, too, having only emerged in the late 19th century when it was mainly didactic and consisted of general biographies and religious and historical fiction. Echoing both Oittinen and Van Coillie, Mdallel (2003: 302) argues that translating children’s literature in Arab countries is not only constrained by publishing limitations but is also influenced by the translator’s perception of childhood, the child’s cognitive abilities, and society’s perception of childhood.

Abdelhaq (2006: 34) agrees that “children’s literature in the Arab World is ideologically biased and has didactic tendencies”, often aiming to promote the moral values associated with the readers’ religion and to raise awareness of the “political and military challenges that face the Arab Nation”. Analyzing the Arabic translation of Rudyard Kipling’s collection of stories *Just So Stories* (1902), he explains that the ST, intended for “didacticism and fun ... [to] teach morals in an enjoyable way”, contained implicit religious and political connotations. As a result, the translator modified many references and omitted others deemed inappropriate for touching on sensitive subjects, including religion, racism, and politics. Abdelhaq (2006) concludes that childhood is a “space of restriction” and that children have a secondary status, with adults, including parents, publishers, writers, and translators, determining what is appropriate for them (p. 48).

Addressing the challenges of translating CSIs in children’s literature, Dukmak (2012) examines how they were rendered in the Arabic translations of

three books from the *Harry Potter* series: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005). The study revealed significant variations in translation strategies ranging from outright abridgment and wholesale deletions to standardization and transliteration. Dukmak concludes that the varying approaches to CSIs across the three books led to inconsistencies in translation norms: while the translators of the first two books failed to demonstrate a “clear and solid strategy of adequacy or acceptability”, the translation of the third book showed a noticeable shift toward adequacy, with a stronger inclination to preserve the ST rather than adapting it to fit the norms of the TC (220). Dukmak attributes these inconsistencies to the “marginal status of children’s literature in the Arab world”, which allowed translators to take liberties with the STs (221).

The studies above are part of a growing but still limited body of research on the translation of children’s literature in the Arab context (Issa 2019; Al-Jabri 2020; Abdel-Fattah 2022; Power 2023; Aljuied 2025). Much of this research, however, focuses on translation from English to Arabic and of novels, giving short shrift to translation from Arabic to English and to other sub-genres, such as picturebooks—with the exception of Chakir and Diouny (2018) who examine the translation of two picturebooks from English into Arabic as well. The limited scope of this scholarship confirms the marginal status of children’s literature in the Arabic literary polysystem, while its focus on translation from English into Arabic reflects the imbalance marking translation flows between core and periphery that Van Coillie (2020) identified above, due to which the peripheral Arabic book market imports more books for children than it exports.

This imbalance is especially pronounced in Gulf countries, particularly the UAE, where substantial institutional and financial investments have been made to promote original children’s literature. These efforts include the establishment of literary boards and book awards, including the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature, which aims to elevate the quality of children’s book production in the UAE and the rest of the Arab world, and the Sheikh Zayed Book Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions in various fields, including children’s literature. However, despite these efforts, there has been little scholarly engagement with how this literary output is being translated into English, especially given the asymmetry characterizing the cultural exchanges.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

For the purposes of this article, we draw on Venuti’s (1998; 2018) ethics of difference and his distinction between foreignization and domestication. Venuti (1998: 6) proposed his ethics of difference precisely “to remedy the asymmetries in translating” and to ensure that translation remains “a place where a cultural other is manifested” (2018: 20). He thus takes issue with domesticating translations that erase the cultural Other and reinscribe domestic values, and calls for a foreignizing translation that preserves the cultural difference of the Other as a “form of resistance against ethnocentrism” and other ills stemming from asymmetrical

power relations (p. 20). Translations should therefore “be written, read, and evaluated with greater respect for linguistic and cultural differences” (1998: 6).

Venuti’s approach has been taken to task for its prescriptivism that fails to take into consideration the complexities of cultural exchanges (see, for instance, Shamma 2005). It still provides valuable insight into the situatedness of translation, emphasizing the extent to which it is always produced and consumed within “relations of domination and exclusion” (Venuti 1998:85). This, according to him, makes translation an inherently political act that can either perpetuate or subvert such relations, hence the need for translation ethics. His foreignizing ethics is thus one that maintains “a refusal of the dominant by developing affiliations with marginal linguistic and cultural values in the receiving situation, including foreign cultures that have been excluded” because of their cultural difference (p. 125). Given that Arabic literature, while no longer completely “embargoed” (Said 1990), still suffers from exclusion precisely because of perceived cultural difference, to the point where “to translate anything from the Arabic becomes an act with immediate and often explicit political significance” (Creswell 2016: 449), Venuti’s approach is particularly appropriate for this study. In fact, Creswell (p. 453) argues that “the estrangement of English and Arabic” calls for the kind of defamiliarization brought about by “any powerful reading experience” rather than for fluent, easy-to-read translations.

Moreover, while Venuti was theorizing mainly about the translation of literature for adults, his ethics is equally valid for the translation of children’s literature, which raises issues that “constantly feed debates on which are the most effective—as well as ethical—ways to deal with cultural elements, tending to domesticate or foreignize the text” (Oittinen, Ketola and Garavini 2018: 84). This is why several scholars have drawn on Venuti’s approach in their study of the translation of children’s literature. Focusing on picturebooks and using eye-tracking, Kruger (2013), for instance, examines the effects of foreignizing translation on both child and adult readers. Her examination reveals “increased cognitive effort involved in the processing of foreignizing translation strategies”, an effort that is likely to help child readers develop “greater lexical, pragmatic and cultural knowledge” (p. 223). Kruger aptly concludes that since reading picturebooks often involves adults, foreignizing translations may “form the starting point of constructive discussion of cultural issues between the child and adult reader” (p. 223). Echoing both Venuti and Kruger, but speaking about children’s literature rather than its translation, McGillis (2008: xxi) calls for “the opening of ears to voices not often enough heard”, the voices of those “who have been either invisible or unfairly constructed or both” for child readers “conditioned by the Eurocentric heritage of the colonizers of North America.” In translation, such an “ear-opening” reading experience is more likely to be had through an ethics of difference that prioritizes cultural difference over fluency and readability.

Given this article’s focus on the translation of CSIs, we also adopt Newmark’s (1988) classification of CSIs and Pedersen’s (2011) taxonomy of strategies for the translation of CSIs. According to Qiufen Amini and Lins’ systematic review (2025: 260), two of the most “seminal” approaches to CSIs are

those proposed by Aixelá (1996) and Newmark (1988). Aixelá (1996: 58) defines CSIs as those “textually actualized items” specific to a source culture that either lack an equivalent in the target language or have a different status in the target culture. This definition echoes that of Newmark (1988: 94) who describes CSIs, or what he calls “cultural words”, as the “manifestations” of a “way of life [...] peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”, and which create “a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source and the target language (and its readership)”. It is, therefore, Newmark’s definition that this article adopts as it offers a broader conceptualization of culture as a “way of life” and provides an appropriate framework for identifying CSIs in the corpus. Moreover, while it was Aixelá who popularized the term “culture-specific item”, it was Newmark who proposed “a more structured and widely adopted taxonomy” (Qiufen et al. 2025: 262). Newmark (1988: 95) identifies five categories of CSIs:

1. Ecology: This category refers to words related to the environment.
2. Material culture: This category contains words that refer to food, clothes, houses, towns and manners of transport.
3. Social culture: This category includes words that refer to concepts of work, leisure, and traditions.
4. Organization, customs, activities, procedure and concepts, such as political, religious, administrative, or historical manner.
5. Gestures and habits.

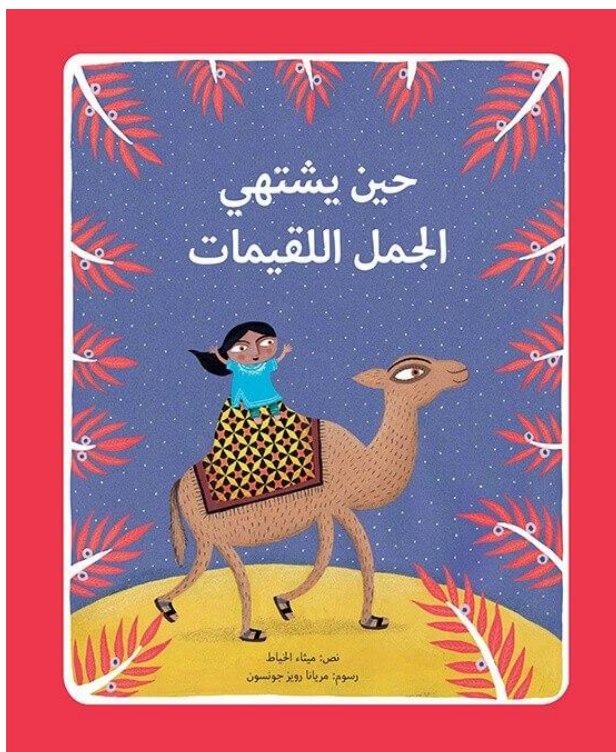
Newmark (1988: 81-91) also proposes a set of over 10 strategies, or what he calls procedures, for the translation of cultural references. However, Pedersen (2011:7 2) rightly argues that Newmark’s taxonomy suffers from several shortcomings, including redundancy. Given that this article focuses on the translation of CSIs in a picturebook, i.e., a multimodal text, Pedersen’s (2011) taxonomy of strategies for the translation of CSIs in (multimodal) audiovisual texts is an appropriate framework. Pedersen identifies six strategies for the translation of CSIs, which he calls extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs): three are source-oriented, i.e., foreignizing strategies, and include retention, which is “the most source-oriented strategy” as it “allows an element from the SC to enter the TT”, either unchanged or slightly modified to meet TL requirements (p. 77); specification, which entails retaining the CSI “in its untranslated form, but adding information” to make the CSI more specific (p. 79); and direct translation, which simply means a literal translation of the CSI, where “the semantic load of the ST [CSI] is unchanged: nothing is added, nor subtracted” (p. 83). The other three strategies are target-oriented, i.e., domesticating, and include omission, generalization, and substitution. Omission, which “can be the most target-oriented strategy available”, entails stopping the “problematic foreign item from entering the TT in any form at all” (p. 96). Generalization involves replacing a CSI “referring to something specific by something more general”, either through a superordinate term or paraphrase (p. 85). Finally, substitution can be either cultural, i.e., by

replacing one ST CSI with a different TC CSI, or situational, i.e., by replacing one ST CSI with “something completely different that fits the situation” (Pedersen 2011: 89).

#### 4. Method

For the purposes of this study, we adopted a qualitative approach to examine a picturebook for readers aged 6 to 9, entitled *حين يشتهي الجمل اللقيمات* (2012), by Emirati author Maitha Al Khayat and its English translation by the author herself under the title *When a Camel Gets the Munchies* (2019). Al Khayat is a multiple award-winning Emirati children's writer and illustrator (ELF Publishing n.d.), with an extensive literary portfolio of over 175 publications. Moreover, her works are particularly known for celebrating Emirati culture. In an interview for the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative, Al Khayat (Garces-Bacsal 2024) laments a lack of “portrayals of identity in [Arabic] children’s books”. Underscoring the asymmetrical power relations between the core and the Arabic peripheral book market, she attributes this lack of cultural representations in Arabic children’s literature to publishers being “more focused on common issues and worldwide topics” and to some writers being more inclined to “write stories that will give them a chance of winning a literary award to gain recognition.” Emirati identity and traditions are therefore very prominent in her books, including *حين يشتهي الجمل اللقيمات* (Al Khayat 2012), a children’s story deeply rooted in Emirati culture, as is flagged on the very cover page.

In the story, a nameless protagonist welcomes her dear friend, the camel, and takes him on a culinary adventure, exploring the richness of Emirati cuisine and, with it, various aspects of Emirati culture, particularly hospitality. The colorful and animated illustrations bring these cultural elements closer to young readers, creating an engaging and immersive cultural experience for them. The book was published by Kalimat Group, a big publishing house in the UAE, which specializes in children's literature and whose objective aligns with Al Khayat’s as it strives to “educat[e] Arab children about the Arab and International culture and their modern challenges” (Kalimat Group n.d.). As to the translation, which kept the same visuals as the original, it was published by a prominent local publisher, namely University Bookshop.



Book cover

For data selection, we proceeded in three stages. In a first stage, we identified all lexical items in the ST that could potentially function as CSIs and then categorized them following Newmark's (1988) definition and framework. We thus only coded cultural words "manifesting" a "way of life peculiar" to Emiratis and posing a translation problem as CSIs. In one borderline case, we referred to the glossary of Emirati terms provided by the author at the end of her book. The item in question, namely "الحصير", was included in the glossary with a definition encoding an Emirati referent: "a mat made from palm fronds, used in the home as a floor covering or rug". We therefore coded it as a CSI consistent with Newmark's definition. Accordingly, we identified 26 CSIs across the book's 40 pages.

In the second stage, we analyzed the strategies used to translate these CSIs following Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy. For instance, we coded a ST CSI as omitted when it did not enter the TT in any form; as translated through generalization when it was rendered through a more general term; and as substituted when it was replaced with a target-culture item or with a different expression that fits the situation. For methodological transparency, we included a table recording each CSI, its category, its TT rendering, and the strategy used in an appendix.

Finally, because the corpus is an “iconotext”, we also included in the analysis the extent to which text-image congruency was maintained in the translation. When a CSI was omitted or translated through generalization, for instance, while the illustration remained unchanged thus continuing to depict an aspect of the “place, culture, society [...or] characters and their relationships” that the CSI encoded (Oittinen 2003:131), we treated it as a case of text-image incongruence.

## 5. Analysis

Given the very topic of the book, as flagged in its title, and the narrative simplicity required by the targeted age group, most of the 26 CSIs identified in the ST belong to material culture, specifically food, with 22 CSIs (see Appendix). The remaining four CSIs fall under ecology. The glossary provided by the author includes 22 of these CSIs.

### CSIs in the ST

Cultural Categories	Number of occurrences
Ecology	4
Material culture (food, cultural items and tools)	22

The prominence of Emirati cultural references in the ST, along with the glossary giving more details about these references, points to a desire to make the book a learning experience with pedagogical value. The author is teaching Emirati children about their own heritage and introducing non-Emirati Arab readers to Emirati culture. Since the English translation was published by a local publisher, the book also has the potential to expose international child readers, including those living in the UAE, to Emirati culture. Moreover, given Al Khayat’s criticism of Arab authors who shy away from cultural representation in their books, the strong presence of CSIs in the ST points to what could be seen as an agenda of cultural pride: the author is deliberately attempting to foreground Emirati cultural identity and celebrate local traditions for child readers. Such cultural anchoring is especially important in peripheral literary systems where increased commercialization of books and unequal translation flows expose local readership to more imported literature, oftentimes leading to cultural dilution, as Van Coillie (2020) warns above.

Accordingly, this ST almost invites a foreignizing approach in its translation. In fact, the blurb on the back cover of the English translation promises just that, as it states that the book is “a humorous rhyming story presenting the UAE traditional customs of food and hospitality” (Al Khayat 2019). Analysis of the TT, however, revealed an overwhelmingly domesticating approach based on heavy use of target-oriented strategies and a very fluent, idiomatic English language. In fact, only four CSIs in the ST were translated using foreignizing strategies (see Appendix).

### 5.1 Selective foreignization

The author/translator used only two foreignizing strategies, namely retention and specification. She thus retained “حلوى”, “بلاليط”, and “هريس”, all names of Emirati dishes, and rendered them respectively as *balalīt*, *ḥalwā* and *harīs*. She also used the two strategies to render the key term *Loquaimāt*, translating it in one instance as “*loquaimāt* crunchies” (Al Khayat 2019:5) and in others as simply “*loquaimāt*”. The retention of this limited number of CSIs—all food-related—and the scarce use of foreignizing strategies suggest that the translation is driven not so much by any consistent commitment to foreignization as by narrative necessity and auditory appeal. The first three retained terms are phonetically easy, while the fourth one is easily translatable because of its immediate relevance to the plot.

These three elements, *balalīt*, *ḥalwā* and *harīs*, in addition to a fourth one, *majlis*, which was added by the author/translator to the TT, are also found in the TT glossary, but with more concise definitions than in the ST’s glossary. For instance, “*Balalīt*” was defined in the original as:

ST: أكلة حلوة معروفة في دولة الإمارات، مصنوعة من الشعيرية المطبوخة أو المقلية، وتزين عادة مع قرص من البيض المقلي

Gloss Translation (GT): “A sweet dish common in the UAE, made from cooked or fried vermicelli, and usually garnished with a fried egg disc.”

In the TT, however, it is simply defined as “a traditional sweet pasta dish”, a translation that not only removes the culinary detail but also flattens Emirati cultural difference. Likewise, “*ḥalwa*” was defined as:

ST: طبق حلو عماني الأصل، لها شهرة واسعة في الإمارات وخارجها، حيث تعرف بأنها رمز للكرم والأصالة، مصنوعة من النشا والبيض، والسكر، والماء، والسمن البلدي

GT: A dessert of Omani origin, widely popular in the Emirates and beyond, known as a symbol of generosity and authenticity, made from starch and eggs, sugar, water, and pure ghee.

In the TT, however, it was defined as “a sweet made from almonds, milk, sugar and spices.” This translation, too, strips the dish of both its origins and cultural significance, and reduces it to a few familiar ingredients with a touch of exoticism through the word “spices”.

In fact, the ST and TT glossaries are different in both length and scope. The former includes 22 entries, all of which are CSIs that may be unfamiliar to Arab child readers, including some Emirati ones. In contrast, the TT glossary is shorter, with only 16 entries, 12 of which are general vocabulary items, such as “to gnaw,” “to snooze,” “pest,” “gesture” and “lame”. The TT glossary is therefore reduced to a mere instrument for linguistic support that risks obscuring the cultural richness of the ST and undermining the stated objective of the translation. Since the translation was published within the UAE, so primarily addressing a multicultural child readership, the opportunity to use the glossary as a tool for “greater lexical, pragmatic and cultural knowledge” (Kruger 2013: 223) was missed.

## 5.2 Domesticating Emirati culture

Apart from the four CSIs above, all remaining items were domesticated, with omission—the most extreme form of domestication—being the most frequently used strategy. Indeed, 14 of the 26 CSIs in the ST were omitted in the translation (see Appendix). In some instances, omission affected key items, as in Example 1.

(1)

ST: حين يشتهي الجمل اللقيمات

GT: When the camel craves the loquaimat

TT: When a camel gets the munchies

This example is tellingly the very title of the book. Through its reference to *Loquaimat*, it immediately foregrounds Emirati cultural identity. Beyond being central to the plot, *Loquaimat* is also an iconic Emirati dessert, associated with Ramadan and social gatherings, and seen as “a testament to [UAE] rich culinary heritage” (Sadek 2024). It thus symbolizes community and tradition. By referring to it in the very title, the author sets the tone for the entire narrative in the ST. However, the reference gets omitted in the translation as it does not enter the TT in any form at all. Instead, the title is reformulated to include an English informal idiom “to get the munchies”. While the English title thus rewritten is playful and easily digestible to the Anglophone child reader, it loses the immediate connection to the Emirati heritage carefully foregrounded in the ST. While such a choice may increase the book’s readability and marketability, it also risks flattening the cultural depth that the ST seeks to offer. This omission on the front cover page of the TT is especially paradoxical considering the blurb on the back cover, which packages the story as a celebration of the “UAE traditional customs of food and hospitality”, thus suggesting that the main objective of the book is to introduce child readers—and the adults reading for/with them—, whether within or outside the UAE to Emirati heritage. From the outset, then, the book forgoes the opportunity to engage these readers with a cultural item that could have sparked their curiosity and inquiry.

Several other omissions are equally intriguing. Given that the TT retained the same visuals as the ST, some of these omissions not only reduce cultural specificity verbally, but also weaken the text-image congruency, as in the two examples.

(2)

ST: فأبى وأحسست أن إرضاء الضيف هو عمل شاق. لكن لم أياس، فرفعت المكب وقلت: لا تحزن فلدينا الهريس وإن أردت شيئاً آخر فهناك أيضاً الخبيص وحتى الساقو، والخنفروش والبثيث

GT: Then he refused, and I felt that pleasing a guest is a hard task. But I didn’t despair, so I lifted the *makabb* and said: Don’t be sad! For we have the *harees*, and if you want something else, then there is also the *khabees*, and even the *saqu* and the *khanfaroush* and the *bithith*.

TT: But with a grunt from the nose that everyone knows. The camel said “no”, and the tension did grow.

Here, the little girl offers an Emirati dish called *ruqaq* to the camel instead of the *Loquaimat* it was craving. Noticing that the camel turned his head away in rejection of this offering, and eager as she is to “please her guest”, she proceeds to

offer other available traditional Emirati dishes that were covered by the *makabb*, a pyramid-shaped cover made from palm fronds that Emiratis use to cover food. Consistent with the author's objective, the use of the Emirati term *makabb* instead of the standard Arabic *ghīṭa*, i.e. cover, and the enumeration of the dishes not only emphasize the author's desire to familiarize the readers with Emirati culinary culture but also create an almost palpable sense of pride in this culture. It also creates a mood of hospitality, generosity and sharing. In fact, these values are foregrounded through the visual message as well, since the illustration shows the little girl extending her hands with a plate of food in a gesture of offering to the camel who has turned his head away.

Instead of going for a literal translation that preserves the ST's rootedness in Emirati cultural identity and maintains its multimodal effect, the author/translator adapts the ST using outright omission. The CSI *makabb* was omitted and so were all the enumerated dishes. While not a CSI, the word "guest" was omitted, too, along with the whole clause where it appeared and which presupposes the need to please guests, thus reinforcing the value of hospitality. The whole passage was, in fact, replaced with a playful and rhyming description of the camel's reaction that foregrounds tension and narrative conflict more than the ST.

These translational decisions achieved rhyming and narrative flow and produced a great read-aloud text. However, by removing the word "guest" and moving from an enumeration of CSIs signaling hospitality and cultural pride, to a character- and conflict-driven narrative that backgrounds the act of offering foregrounded both verbally and visually in the ST, the translation results in two losses. It significantly reduces Emirati cultural specificity. It also weakens the text-image congruency since, in Oittinen's terms, the TT illustration—which is the same as the ST's—no longer "doubles or parallels" what the words say. It centers the act of offering rather than refusal and tension. This intervention is a recurrent pattern in the translation, as is clear in Example 3.

(3)

ST: حتى وصلنا إلى شجرة غاف كبيرة فعرفت أننا وصلنا بيت جدتي الحبيبة

GT: Until we reached a big *ghaf* tree... then I knew that we reached the house of my beloved grandmother.

TT: We saw a house as small as a mouse. And when her green grass was as clear as a glass. We knocked on the door and told her the score.

In this passage, the little girl travels with the camel through the desert to visit her grandmother, who will help her make the *Loquaimat* that the camel craves. On their way, they come across a *Ghaf* tree, a very rare tree that thrives in the harsh desert environment of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the UAE. More than just a tree, however, the *Ghaf* has come to acquire deep-rooted cultural meaning for the Emirati people. It evokes traditional desert life and signifies resilience, adaptability to hardship and communal ties to the land, so much so that it was declared the UAE national tree in 2008 (Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi n.d.). While it is not a CSI, "grandmother" is another cultural marker in this passage that connotes warmth ("beloved") and tradition—since she is the one who will help make the traditional

dish. And while she is not included in the illustration, she is directly referenced and foregrounded through a rheme position in the ST.

In the TT, however, the cultural reference “*ghaf*” is omitted. In fact, both the local fauna and flora get westernized as they are replaced by motifs that are more familiar to an Anglo-American readership, namely “green grass” and “mouse”. Likewise, the “beloved grandmother” is omitted and replaced with a pronoun and an English idiom, a decision that allowed the translator to achieve rhyming and create a playful, action-oriented TT, but that resulted in the depersonalization and backgrounding of the grandmother and her familial and cultural role. To use Klingberg’s terminology (1986), in her quest for readability, the author/translator appears to have “purified” the ST, i.e., sanitizing it of local cultural values to align it more with a Western frame of reference.

This omission is equally significant at the level of the iconotext. As Oittinen (2003: 131) notes, illustrations coalesce with the verbal message to construct the “place, culture, society as well as characters and their relationships”. Here, the TT visuals continue to situate the little girl’s journey in a distinctly Gulf landscape, where the child reader can see sand dunes, palm trees and sparse vegetation that evoke an arid local environment, whereas the TT verbal message redirects the reader toward more generic imagery that evokes a greener, lush landscape. This results in a reduced congruency between the culturally specific environment suggested visually and the one named verbally.

The translational decisions in this example also underscore the unequal power relations whereby dominant cultures define acceptable norms, and could be read as reflecting how translators/authors from peripheral markets sometimes internalize and accommodate dominant cultural expectations, even within their national borders, in pursuit of broader accessibility and greater marketability, lending credence to Al Khayat’s very own critique. Such a translation mode is no less salient in instances where the author/translator retains the CSIs but chooses to translate them in more general terms, as the examples below demonstrate.

### 5.3 Generalization

Another domesticating strategy that was frequently used in this translation is generalization. While it is less extreme than omission, it had similar effects, as the examples below show.

(4)

ST: وفجأة تدخل والدتي وهي تحمل معها الفوالية.

GT: And suddenly, my mother enters carrying with her the *fuwala*.

TT: Suddenly, it was time for lunch and for both of us to munch.

When the camel first visits the little girl, the mother welcomes him with a “فوالية” *Fuwala*. In Emirati culture, *Fuwala* refers to the spread of traditional dishes with which guests are welcomed anytime they arrive, including *halwa*, *harees*, and *khanfarush*, mentioned above. *Fuwala* is then another marker of Emirati culture,

standing for hospitality, generosity and abundance. In the translation, however, this CSI is replaced with the more generic but familiar meal “lunch”. As in Example 3, another family figure, namely the mother, is omitted altogether. Moreover, the unchanged TT illustration, showing the mother getting the *fuwala* ready for the guest, no longer “doubles or parallels” the verbal message. Yet again, this translation sacrifices Emirati cultural specificity for rhyming and readability through an extremely fluent English language. This gain, however, can hardly offset the losses: the iconotext is less congruent; Emirati difference is flattened, women’s agency in perpetuating tradition and their role in nurturing are backgrounded, and another opportunity for cultural learning is missed.

(5)

ST: وقفت أساعدها في وضع الطعام فوق السرود.

GT: I stood helping her in placing the food on the *sarud*.

TT: So much food on the mat, a lot to look at.

As per custom, the mother puts the *Fuwala* spread on “,السرود” the *sarud*. In the UAE, the *sarud* is a traditional handcrafted mat made of palm fronds. Typically placed directly on the floor, it is used to serve food, including for guests. Because of its shape, it stands not only for hospitality and craftsmanship but also for togetherness insofar as all members of the family or all guests and hosts sit on the floor around it, with no regard for hierarchy. After the deep social and economic changes that Emirati society has witnessed over the past few decades, this traditional handicraft fell out of use but “remained a symbol of [Emirati] cultural and traditional identity” (Al-Naqbi Jan. 25 2025).

In the translation, however, the *sarud* becomes a more general “mat.” The result is not only the watering down of Emirati cultural difference, but also the inscription of another difference in the text. While the “mat” exists in Anglo-American culture, it stands less for community, hospitality and equality than for cleanliness, order and personal/individual space/serving. The effects of this generalization are compounded by the omission of the mother-daughter interaction and, with it, the role of the Emirati mother in initiating the daughter into the art of hospitality.

(6)

ST: عرضت عليه خبز الرقاق.

GT: I offered him *ruqaq* bread.

TT: Some crispy bread before bed?

In her attempt to appease the disgruntled camel, the little girl offers him a variety of Emirati dishes, including *Khubbz Ruqāq*. *Khubbz ruqaq*, or *riqaq* as pronounced in Emirati dialect, is a traditional Emirati bread made mainly of flour and water. It is therefore known for its thinness and crispiness. It is rendered in the TT as “crispy bread”. Prima facie, this translation might seem like a simple direct translation. However, the loss incurred in replacing a very local and specific food with a more general one is compounded by the softening of hospitality in the TT. Indeed, “I offered him” in the ST reflects a positive politeness strategy that

foregrounds not only generosity but also social closeness. In the TT, this positive strategy is replaced with a negative one, through the question, which softens the imposition by making the offer indirectly and allowing the camel a way to refuse. Such a politeness strategy is more aligned with the Anglo-American reader's cultural norms of politeness.

The translations above give insight into the "child image" (Oittinen 2002) shaping the translator's decisions throughout: it is a universalized, culturally sheltered child reader who is schooled in easy entertainment through rhyming and playful idioms and has, therefore, very little ability to grasp foreign concepts even with the help of illustrations, a glossary and the potential presence of an adult reader. It is a child reader who needs a "nanny translation" (O'Sullivan 2025) that is "heavily adapted to their target culture, or 'domesticated'" (O'Sullivan 2019: 18).

The manipulations involved in this nanny translation, from omissions to generalizations, cannot be attributed to state censorship as the text and the omitted CSIs are not remotely political. Rather, they can more plausibly be read as the result of the author/translator's self-censorship due to "perceived norms", specifically norms of content as identified by O'Sullivan (2019: 20), and which regulate what content and values can be transferred. Translating from a peripheral language and literary polysystem into a dominant language and literary polysystem, the translator appears to perceive Emirati culture as too unfamiliar for her presumed target child reader, and therefore potentially as hindering the readability and marketability of the text.

The result is a domesticating translation that falls short of introducing children to what Van Coillie (2020) describes as "an alternative view of the world that challenges dominant ideas, stereotypes, norms and values" (p. 142). Through extreme fluency, this domesticating translation "masquerades as a true semantic equivalence when it in fact inscribes the text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very differences that translation is called to convey" (Venuti 2018: 16).

More troubling, this domesticating thrust does allow the translator to produce an undeniably accessible and easy-to-read TT. However, because only the verbal components of the ST were adapted, while the visual components crossed over unchanged to the English text, the domestication was inconsistent. Text and image were therefore often less congruent than in the ST, potentially undermining the translator's efforts to ensure readability.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to fill a critical gap in the scholarship on the translation of Arabic children's literature into English by investigating the English translation of Maitha Al Khayat's (2012) *حين يشتهي الجمل اللقيمات*, with a focus on CSIs. The analysis revealed a clear propensity toward the use of domesticating strategies for the translation of Emirati CSIs, from generalization to outright omission. Prioritizing fluency, rhyming and accessibility, the writer/translator produced a very playful translation that works very well "on the aloud reader's tongue" (Oittinen 2000:69).

It also offers some pedagogical value through the (much) shorter glossary provided at the end, but this glossary mostly includes general English vocabulary.

In so doing, however, the author/translator replaced Emirati imagery with more Western imagery and backgrounded not only the Emirati heritage foregrounded in the ST, but also—at times—the gendered roles of the mother and grandmother and, with them, Emirati women’s agency in preserving and transmitting heritage and tradition. The result is a “nanny translation” that reflects the “image” of a child reader with little curiosity about and receptiveness to cultural difference, even when this difference is visually supported or already familiar to English-speaking children in the UAE.

Moreover, the flattening of Emirati cultural specificity that resulted from such domestication undermines the stated objective of the translation, namely to present “the UAE traditional customs of food and hospitality” (Al Khayat 2019), potentially hindering cross-cultural engagement and appreciation of cultural diversity. Because the domestication was not consistent and because the visual component of the ST remained unchanged, the translation was also oftentimes potentially confusing. It thus flouts three of the rules Oittinen (2002) argues translators for children should respect: making translational decisions based on “the purpose and the function of the whole translation process”, ensuring the translation functions “alongside the illustrations” (p. 69), and applying their approach “knowingly and consistently” (p. 91).

Venuti (1998: 82) rightly asserts that all translations are inherently ethnocentric and, therefore, domesticating. He calls, however, on translators to balance this thrust by taking “into account the interests of more than just those of a cultural constituency that occupies a dominant position” (p. 83). While the present translation is produced from the periphery, it is no less ethnocentric than translations produced in the center, nor less aligned with the dominant Anglo-American cultural constituency insofar as it appears to have internalized the latter’s demands of acceptability and marketability. Indeed, translators from the periphery always function within “hierarchies of dominance and marginality”, which in turn shape “the production, circulation, and reception of texts” (Venuti 2018: 14).

What this case underscores is the importance for writers, translators and publishers to develop awareness that translating children’s literature is as situated and contingent as translating for adults. As such, these stakeholders must approach it not as a mere technical practice for a playful reading experience, but as an ethical practice that needs to strike a balance between both linguistic readability and cultural visibility in order to offer child readers an enriching and “ear-opening” encounter with difference (McGillis 2008).

Khawla Rashid Binfahd (PhD Candidate)

Department of Foreign Languages, University of Sharjah, UAE

ORCID Number: 0009-0004-8731-7947

Email: U22102645@sharjah.ac.ae

Sanaa Benmessaoud (Assistant Professor) – Corresponding Author

Department of Foreign Languages, University of Sharjah, UAE

ORCID Number: 0000-0002-8869-9551

Email: sbenmessaoud@sharjah.ac.ae

Sharif Alghazo (Associate Professor) - Corresponding Author

Department of Foreign Languages, University of Sharjah, UAE

Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Jordan, Jordan

ORCID Number: 0000-0002-8163-283X

Email: salghazo@sharjah.ac.ae

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Appendix. CSIs

CSI	Category	English Translation	Translation Strategy
القعود	Ecology	Omitted	Omission
العرقوب	Ecology	Dunes	Generalization
الهور	Ecology	Omitted	Omission
شجرة الغاف	Ecology	Omitted	Omission
اللقيمات	Material culture: food	Loquimat crunchies	Specification
العريش	Material culture: cultural item	Omitted	Omission
النعال	Material culture: cultural item	Shoes	Generalization
الدلة	Material culture: tool	Omitted	Omission
الفنجان	Material culture: tool	Cup	Generalization
الفوالة	Material culture: food	Lunch	Generalization
السرود	Material culture: cultural item	Mat	Generalization
البلايط	Material culture: food	Balaleet	Retention
الحلوى	Material culture: food	Halwa	Retention

الرقاق	Material culture: food	Crispy bread	Generalization
المكب	Material culture: tool	Omitted	Omission
الهريس	Material culture: food	Harees	Retention
الخبيص	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
الساقو	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
الخنفروش	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
البنيث	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
الحصير	Material culture: cultural item	Omitted	Omission
الجفير	Material culture: tool	Basket	Generalization
هيل	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
زعفران	Material culture: food	Omitted	Omission
الملاس	Material culture: tool	Omitted	Omission
الدبس	Material culture: food	Date syrup	Direct translation