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Translating the Use of Arabic as an Integration Tool In Ameen Rihani's "The Book of Khalid"

ترجمة استخدام اللغة العربية كأداة اندماج الثقافي في رواية أمين رحاني "كتاب خالد"

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Abstract

The literature of the Arab diaspora in the early twentieth century constitutes a unique site of linguistic and cultural negotiation, in which Arabic and English intersect, collide, and ultimately fuse into hybrid literary forms. This article examines the mechanisms through which Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), one of the founding figures of Arab American literature, employs Arabic as a deliberate acculturative tool in his pioneering English-language novel, The Book of Khalid (1911). Drawing on theoretical frameworks of acculturation, code-switching, and translation studies, particularly the concepts of foreignization, exoticism, and compensation, the article argues that Rihani's bilingualism is not incidental but constitutive: Arabic functions in his prose as an instrument of identity assertion, cultural resistance, and cross-civilizational dialogue. Through close analysis of three primary linguistic, the article demonstrates how Rihani deliberately exoticizes the East for his Western readership while simultaneously anchoring his narrative in an Arab philosophical and spiritual tradition. The article further addresses the specific challenges that these mechanisms pose for the translation of the novel into Arabic, arguing that the translator's primary obligation is to preserve the hybrid, translinguistic texture of the original rather than domesticating it for Arab readers. Compensation strategies are proposed as the most adequate means of reproducing in the target language the acculturative dynamic that defines Rihani's literary project.

Key words: acculturation, integration, English Arab diaspora, Ameen Rihani, literary translation, cultural hybridity

الملخص

يُشكّل أدب المهجر العربي في مطلع القرن العشرين فضاءً فريداً للتفاوض اللغوي والثقافي، تتقاطع فيه العربية والإنجليزية —لغة الأصل ولغة الانتماء الجديد— وتتصادم وتنصهر في نهاية المطاف في أشكال أدبية هجينة .تتناول هذه المقالة الآليات التي يوظّف من خلالها أمين الريحاني (1876–1940)، أحد مؤسسي الأدب العربي الأمريكي، اللغةَ العربية أداةً مقصودة للمثاقفة في روايته الرائدة المكتوبة بالإنجليزية، كتاب خالد

.(1911)وتنطلق المقالة من أطر نظرية في المثاقفة والتبديل بين اللغات ودراسات الترجمة ولا سيما مفاهيم التغريب والإغراب والتعويض لتؤكد أن ازدواجية الريحاني اللغوية ليست عرَضية بل تأسيسية :إذ تؤدي العربية في نثره وظيفةَ إثبات الهوية والمقاومة الثقافية والحوار الحضاري .وعبر التحليل الدقيق لثلاثة آليات لغوية رئيسية الاقتراض المعجمي، والتبديل الرمزي بين اللغتين، والتكييف الصرفي —تُبيّن المقالة كيف يُغرّب الريحاني الشرق أمام القارئ الغربي عمداً، فيما يُرسّخ روايته في تقليد فلسفي وروحي عربي أصيل .وتتناول المقالة فضلاً عن ذلك التحديات التي تطرحها هذه الآليات على ترجمة الرواية إلى العربية، مؤكدةً أن الالتزام الأول للمترجم هو الحفاظ على النسيج الهجين عبر اللغوي للأصل بدلاً من تطبيعه للقارئ العربي.

كلمات مفتاحية: المثاقفة، أدب المهجر، أمين الريحاني، التغريب، ترجمة الأدب

Introduction

Among the most consequential literary experiments of the early twentieth century is the emergence of Arab American writing — a body of work produced by Levantine immigrants who, having crossed the Atlantic in search of new lives, found themselves occupying a culturally in-between position that their literature sought to articulate, negotiate, and ultimately transform into a source of creative strength. The members of the Al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya (the Pen Bond, or American Pen League), founded in New York in 1920, were among the most prominent of these writers: Elia Abu Madi, Mikhail Naimy, Khalil Gibran, and — arguably the most philosophically ambitious of the group — Ameen Rihani. Writing about the experience of displacement, exile, and cross-cultural encounter, they forged a literature that was, as one scholar has aptly described it, "Arab in its concerns, English in language, and American in spirit and platform" (Amoia, 2001).

It is within this broader formation that Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid (1911) occupies a singular position. Widely regarded as the first Arab American novel, it is also one of the most linguistically self-conscious literary works of the period — a text in which the interplay between Arabic and English is not a stylistic accident but a philosophical and political programme. Rihani wrote in English, but he wrote as an Arab: his prose is permeated with Arabic lexical borrowings, Islamic religious formulae, and cultural references drawn from the Levantine world he had left behind. The result is a text of extraordinary hybridity — one that simultaneously addresses Western readers and insists on the irreducible foreignness of the Eastern world it represents.

This article investigates the mechanisms through which Rihani deploys Arabic within his English narrative, and examines the specific challenges that these mechanisms pose for the translation of the novel into Arabic. Our central argument is twofold. First, we contend that Rihani's use of Arabic is a deliberate acculturative strategy: it functions as a tool of identity assertion, cultural resistance, and cross-civilizational dialogue that is central to the novel's meaning. (بو عنيقة، 2023) Second, we argue that any adequate translation of The Book of Khalid into Arabic must preserve this hybrid linguistic texture, resisting the temptation of domestication and finding compensatory means of reproducing the acculturative dynamic in the target language.

1. Theoretical Framework: Acculturation, Hybridity, and Translation

The concept of acculturation, as developed in cultural anthropology and subsequently adopted in literary studies, refers to the processes of cultural change that occur when individuals or groups come into

sustained contact with a culture different from their own (Berry, 1997). Unlike assimilation — which implies the wholesale adoption of the dominant culture at the expense of the culture of origin — acculturation designates a more dynamic and selective process in which elements of both cultures are retained, adapted, and recombined into new configurations. In literary terms, acculturation produces texts that are characterized by what Homi Bhabha (1994) has theorized as cultural hybridity: the emergence of a "third space" of enunciation in which fixed cultural identities are destabilized and new, interstitial forms of cultural expression become possible.

Rihani's literary practice maps closely onto this theoretical terrain. His novel does not simply describe the experience of acculturation from the outside; it enacts it at the level of language. By writing in English while saturating his prose with Arabic, he performs the very condition of cultural in-betweenness that his protagonist Khalid inhabits. This linguistic hybridity is, in the terms proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), a form of heteroglossia — the coexistence within a single text of multiple, socially and culturally distinct voices and language registers — that refuses the monolingualism of both the Western host culture and the Arab culture of origin.

For the translator, this hybridity presents a set of challenges that existing frameworks in translation studies are only partially equipped to address. The primary theoretical opposition that is relevant here is that between foreignization and domestication, as theorized by Lawrence Venuti (1995). A domesticating translation strategy seeks to produce a text that reads naturally in the target language, replacing source-culture elements with target-culture equivalents that are familiar and accessible to target readers. A foreignizing strategy, by contrast, retains the cultural and linguistic otherness of the source text, making the translated culture visible and resisting the erasure of difference. In the case of The Book of Khalid, the case for foreignization is particularly compelling: to domesticate Rihani's Arabic insertions in an Arabic translation — to make them, as it were, disappear into the surrounding prose — would be to destroy the very effect that Rihani was aiming for. (ابتسام, 2018) A strategy of compensation (Harvey, 1995) — whereby elements lost in one part of the translation are offset by equivalent elements introduced elsewhere — offers a more nuanced approach, and will be discussed in Section 5.

2. Ameen Rihani and the Arab American Literary Tradition

Ameen Rihani was born in 1876 in the village of Freike, in the Mount Lebanon district, then part of the Ottoman Empire. He emigrated to the United States as a teenager, settling in New York, where he became immersed in the literary and philosophical currents of the late nineteenth century — particularly the transcendentalism of Emerson and Whitman, the social criticism of Rousseau and Voltaire, and the mystical traditions of both Islam and Christianity. This intellectual formation would prove decisive: Rihani's work is characterized by a philosophical cosmopolitanism that seeks to synthesize Eastern spirituality and Western rationalism into a vision of universal human brotherhood.

Within the Arab American literary tradition, Rihani occupies a position of particular importance. Rihani was a systematic thinker who engaged directly with the political and social questions of his time: nationalism, sectarianism, imperialism, and the nature of cultural identity. His extensive output, which included novels, essays, poetry, and political treatises in both English and Arabic, reflects a sustained commitment to what he saw as the essential task of the Arab intellectual in the modern world: the

construction of a cultural identity that was neither servile toward the West nor imprisoned in a romanticized vision of the Arab past.

The Book of Khalid is the fullest expression of this project. Its protagonist, Khalid, a young Lebanese immigrant in New York, oscillates between the material seductions of American life and his increasingly urgent sense of belonging to a spiritual and philosophical tradition rooted in the Arab and Islamic world. The novel's philosophical ambition is announced in a passage that Rihani places near its conclusion — a passage that also encapsulates the cross-civilizational dialogue at the heart of his literary vision:

> "Give me, the mighty nations of the West, the material comforts of life; and you, my East, let me partake of the spiritual heritage. Give me, America, the hand; and yours, too, Asia, your land of origination, where Light and Spirit first arose, disdain not the gifts which the nations of the West bring you; and your land of organisation and power, where Science and Freedom reign supreme, disdain not the bounties of the sunrise." (p. 246)

This passage is paradigmatic of Rihani's method: the rhetoric is that of English prose, but the vision is that of an Arab thinker who insists on the equal dignity and complementarity of East and West. Language, in this context, is not merely a medium but a message.

3. Mechanisms of Arabic Incorporation and Their Translation Implications

Rihani employs three distinct linguistic mechanisms to incorporate Arabic into his English prose: lexical borrowing, code-switching, and morphological adaptation. Each mechanism serves a specific acculturative function, and each poses specific challenges for translation. We examine them in turn.

3.1 Lexical Borrowing: Asserting the Arabic Cultural Lexicon

The most pervasive mechanism of Arabic incorporation in The Book of Khalid is lexical borrowing — the direct insertion of Arabic words and phrases into the English prose without translation or explanation. This strategy is evident from the novel's structural organization: the paratextual apparatus itself is bilingual, with chapter headings that include AL-FATIHAH (from the opening Sura of the Quran, conventionally used in Arabic to designate the beginning of a text), AL-KHATIMA (the closing chapter), and section titles such as IN KULMAKAN, WITH THE HURIS, and THE KAABA OF SOLITUDE. These headings do not merely provide organizational signposts; they frame the novel's narrative within an Islamic and Arabic cultural universe from its very first pages.

Within the body of the text, Rihani deploys an extensive repertoire of borrowed Arabic expressions, drawn from three overlapping domains: Islamic religious practice, Arabic literary culture, and everyday Levantine vernacular speech. The following table provides an overview of the principal borrowings and their acculturative functions:

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications

billah! / Allahu Akbar! / bismillah / Iblis / Izrail	Direct borrowing — Islamic religious lexicon retained without gloss	These expressions function as markers of Islamic religious identity, anchoring the narrator's and protagonist's subjectivity within an Islamic cultural framework. The absence of any explanatory gloss is a deliberate defamiliarizing strategy: the Western reader is not guided toward understanding but invited to experience the otherness of the Islamic world. In an Arabic translation, these terms lose their foreignizing effect entirely, since they are part of the target reader's own cultural lexicon. The translator must find compensatory strategies to reproduce this effect.

Source	**Strategy**	**Analysis & Translation Implications**
Salaam / Marhaba! / ya habibi / ya Gazalty / dakhilek!	Direct borrowing — Levantine vernacular expressions retained in Arabic script equivalents	These everyday Levantine expressions of greeting, affection, and supplication carry the warmth and intimacy of the Arabic-speaking world and serve to contrast sharply with the formality and anonymity of the New York environment. Their insertion into the English prose creates a code-switching effect that marks moments of cultural authenticity and emotional directness. In an Arabic translation, their vernacular quality might be preserved by rendering them in colloquial Arabic rather than Modern Standard Arabic.

Source	**Strategy**	**Analysis & Translation Implications**

Al-Moutanabbi / Sibawayhi / Jelal'ud-deen Romy / Sindbad	Direct borrowing — proper nouns from Arabic literary and cultural tradition	The deployment of these iconic names — the great Abbasid poet, the founding grammarian of Arabic, the Persian Sufi mystic, the folk hero of the Arabian Nights — constitutes an act of literary self-positioning. Rihani places his novel within a canon of Eastern learning and literary excellence, implicitly claiming for Arabic culture an intellectual prestige equivalent to that of the Western tradition. In an Arabic translation, these names carry no foreignizing charge; the compensation must come from an amplification of the Western literary references (Rousseau, Voltaire, Emerson, Dickens, Shakespeare) that appear elsewhere in the text.

A crucial aspect of Rihani's borrowing strategy is his deliberate refusal to provide translations or explanations of the Arabic terms he introduces. This refusal is not an oversight but a philosophical statement: the Western reader must make an effort to encounter the East on its own terms, rather than having the East translated into Western categories of understanding. As Rihani himself suggests through Khalid's projected ambitions, the work aspires to be written in a universal language — but that universal language must accommodate Arabic, not erase it.

3.2 Code-Switching: Performing Bicultural Identity

The second mechanism of Arabic incorporation is code-switching: the alternation between English and Arabic within a single utterance or passage. Code-switching, as sociolinguists have extensively documented, is a characteristic feature of bilingual speech communities and serves a range of social and communicative functions, including the signaling of group membership, the expression of cultural solidarity, and the marking of shifts in register or emotional intensity (Myers-Scotton, 1993). In literary discourse, code-switching acquires additional dimensions of meaning, functioning as a performative assertion of bicultural identity and as a formal enactment of the text's thematic concerns.

In The Book of Khalid, code-switching occurs at particularly charged moments in the narrative — moments of religious invocation, emotional intimacy, or cultural self-assertion. The following examples are representative:

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications
"O merciful Allah!"	Code-switching: English syntactic frame + Arabic divine name	The exclamation retains the English grammatical structure ('O merciful...') while inserting the Arabic name of God rather than its English equivalent 'God.' This hybrid formulation is irreducible to either language alone: it is the utterance of a speaker who inhabits two linguistic worlds simultaneously. The Arabic name 'Allah' carries connotations — theological, cultural, phonetic — that the English 'God' cannot fully reproduce. In an Arabic translation, 'يا الله الرحيم' or 'يا رحمن يا رحيم' would render the meaning but lose the hybridity that is the utterance's defining quality.

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications
"Peace and Salaam" (p. 50)	Code-switching: bilingual doubling — English term + Arabic equivalent	The juxtaposition of 'Peace' and 'Salaam' is not redundant but additive: it enacts, in miniature, the cross-cultural dialogue that the novel as a whole promotes. The English 'peace' and the Arabic 'salaam' are etymologically related (both deriving from the Semitic root s-l-m), but they belong to different cultural universes. By placing them side by side, Rihani suggests the possibility of a meeting between those universes without the dissolution of either. In an Arabic translation, the bilingual doubling collapses, since 'salaam' is already the Arabic word for peace. A

		compensatory rendering might juxtapose the Arabic 'سلام' with an English loanword or a transliterated English term.

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications
Khalid is called 'my Beduin Boy' and 'my Dervish Boy' (p. 89)	Code-switching: Arabic cultural categories inserted into English speech of American characters	The epithets 'Beduin Boy' and 'Dervish Boy,' applied to Khalid by his American interlocutors, are particularly revealing. They demonstrate how Arabic cultural categories are not only asserted by the Arab protagonist but also projected onto him by Western observers — a dynamic of Orientalist labeling that Rihani depicts with ironic awareness. In an Arabic translation, these terms would lose their exotic charge. A compensatory strategy might involve rendering American slang or culturally specific American expressions used by these characters in transliterated English, thereby preserving the sense of cultural distance.

3.3 Morphological Adaptation: Hybridizing Grammar

The third and most linguistically innovative mechanism in The Book of Khalid is what we may call morphological adaptation: the application of English grammatical morphology to Arabic lexical items, producing hybrid word forms that belong fully to neither language. This is perhaps the most direct formal expression of acculturation in the novel, enacting at the level of the word itself the fusion of two linguistic systems.

Two examples are particularly instructive. When Khalid declares his intention to write "Diwans and Quasidahs on the wonders of America" (p. 133), Rihani pluralizes the Arabic nouns diwan (دِيوَان, a collection of poetry) and qasida (قصيدة, a classical Arabic ode) using the English plural suffix -s, producing 'Diwans' and 'Quasidahs.' In Arabic, the correct plurals are dawawin (دَوَاوين) and qasaʾid (قَصَائِد) respectively — both formed through the system of broken plurals that is one of the most distinctive features of Arabic morphology. By replacing these with the regular English -s suffix, Rihani creates word forms that are

grammatically English but lexically Arabic: a formal enactment of the immigrant's condition, caught between the grammatical systems of two languages.

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications
"Diwans and Quasidahs" (English plural -s applied to Arabic nouns)	Morphological hybridization: English suffix + Arabic stem	The hybrid plural forms are not simply errors or approximations; they are deliberate markers of linguistic in-betweenness. The Western reader encounters an Arabic literary form (the diwan, the qasida) but through the morphological lens of English — an experience that reproduces, in miniature, the encounter between East and West that the novel thematizes. In an Arabic translation, the morphological hybridity is impossible to reproduce directly, since Arabic grammar does not admit of English plural suffixes. A compensatory note, or the use of a transliterated hybrid form, might signal the original's innovative quality.

Source	Strategy	Analysis & Translation Implications
"Al Islam" (p. 300) — Arabic definite article retained with English noun	Morphological adaptation: Arabic article 'Al-' retained before Islamic proper noun	The retention of the Arabic definite article 'Al-' before 'Islam' is a subtle but significant acculturative gesture. In English, proper nouns designating religions do not take the definite article ('Islam,' not 'the Islam'); in Arabic, الإسلام takes the definite article as a matter of standard usage. By writing 'Al Islam' rather than simply 'Islam,' Rihani imports the Arabic grammatical convention into his English prose, producing a form

		that is marked as foreign — that signals its Arabic origin — rather than assimilating smoothly into English. In an Arabic translation, this distinction is entirely invisible, since الإسلام is the standard Arabic form. The foreignizing charge is irretrievably lost.

4. Translation Strategy: Preserving Hybridity in the Arabic Translation

The analysis presented in Section 4 demonstrates that Rihani's use of Arabic in The Book of Khalid is not a set of isolated stylistic decisions but a systematic acculturative strategy that operates across multiple levels of the text — lexical, syntactic, morphological, and paratextual. This has profound implications for the translation of the novel into Arabic, since the acculturative effect that Rihani achieves in his English original — the sense of a text that belongs to two cultural worlds simultaneously — cannot be reproduced in Arabic by the same means. When the Arabic insertions are translated into their surrounding language, they cease to be insertions and become part of the continuous fabric of the prose; the foreignizing charge is neutralized; the hybridity disappears.

This is not to say that translation is impossible, but rather that it requires a deliberate and theoretically informed strategy. We propose the following principles for the Arabic translation of The Book of Khalid.

4.1 Preservation of the Paratextual Arabic Frame

The bilingual chapter headings (AL-FATIHAH, AL-KHATIMA, THE KAABA OF SOLITUDE, etc.) should be preserved in their original English forms in the Arabic translation, with Arabic glosses provided in footnotes or parentheses. This approach allows the Arabic reader to perceive the foreignizing gesture that Rihani made in his English original — the gesture of naming Arabic concepts in their Arabic originals within an English text — while understanding that this gesture is now inverted: the Arabic reader must encounter these Arabic concepts as they appeared to Rihani's Western reader, filtered through the lens of the English language.

4.2 Amplification of Western Cultural Markers as Compensation

Since the Arabic cultural expressions that Rihani borrows into his English prose will inevitably lose their foreignizing charge when the text is translated into Arabic, the translator must seek compensatory strategies elsewhere in the text. The most productive source of compensation is the novel's extensive repertoire of Western cultural references: the names of Rousseau, Voltaire, Emerson, Dickens, Balzac, and Shakespeare; the urban geography of New York and Brooklyn; the institutions, customs, and idioms of American life. In the Arabic translation, these Western elements should not be domesticated or explained away but should be allowed — indeed encouraged — to retain their foreignness. American slang expressions, culturally specific idioms, and place names might be transliterated rather than translated,

producing in the Arabic reader something of the sense of cultural dislocation that the Arabic borrowings produced in Rihani's Western reader.

4.3 Retention of Hybrid Morphological Forms with Annotation

The morphologically hybrid forms discussed in Section 3.3 — 'Diwans,' 'Quasidahs,' 'Al Islam' — present a particularly difficult challenge, since their linguistic effect depends on the juxtaposition of Arabic and English grammatical systems that is impossible to replicate within a monolingual Arabic text. We propose that these forms be rendered in transliterated Arabic script in the translation, with footnotes drawing the reader's attention to the hybrid quality of the original. This approach preserves the scholarly and documentary value of Rihani's linguistic experiment while acknowledging the inevitable loss that translation entails in this domain.

4.4 Resisting Domestication as an Ethical Imperative

The overarching principle that should guide the Arabic translation of The Book of Khalid is a principled resistance to domestication. As we have argued throughout this article, the novel's hybridity is not a stylistic ornament but its central thematic and ideological proposition: the claim that cultures meet and enrich each other without one dissolving into the other. To produce an Arabic translation that reads as though it were originally written in Arabic — that normalizes Rihani's English and erases the traces of his acculturative struggle — would be to betray the novel's deepest meaning. The Arabic reader, like Rihani's Western reader, must be made to feel the presence of another cultural world pressing against the boundaries of the language they are reading. Only then will the translation have fulfilled its obligation to the original.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid (1911) is a text of extraordinary linguistic and cultural complexity, in which Arabic functions not merely as a source of decorative exoticism but as a systematic acculturative tool — an instrument of identity assertion, cultural dialogue, and philosophical synthesis. Through three primary mechanisms — lexical borrowing, code-switching, and morphological adaptation — Rihani creates a prose that belongs simultaneously to two linguistic and cultural worlds, enacting at the level of form the cross-civilizational dialogue that the novel advocates at the level of content.

The translation of this novel into Arabic confronts a fundamental paradox: the very Arabic expressions that create the foreignizing effect in the English original become invisible when the text is transferred to an Arabic-language context. Meeting this challenge requires a translation strategy that is theoretically informed, culturally sensitive, and willing to accept a degree of deliberate foreignness in the target text. Specifically, we have proposed the preservation of the bilingual paratextual frame, the amplification of Western cultural markers as a compensatory mechanism, the annotation of morphologically hybrid forms, and an overarching commitment to resisting domestication.

Ultimately, what The Book of Khalid teaches us — as readers and as translators — is that some texts are constitutively untranslatable in the narrow sense: their deepest meanings reside precisely in the gap between languages, in the friction of cultural difference, in the space where one idiom presses against another without either giving way. The translator's task, in such cases, is not to eliminate that friction but to reproduce it — to find, in the target language, the means of making the reader feel the presence of a world that is irreducibly other. Rihani himself was the first to understand this. In placing Arabic at the heart of his

English novel, he was not making a concession to his origins but issuing a philosophical challenge to his readers: learn to hear the other language, even when you cannot understand it.

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