Acculturation in Translating Carrollian Nonsense: Arabic Versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the 1865 Original Edition

التثاقف في ترجمة اللا معنى عند لويس كارول: النسخ العربية من مغامرات أليس في بلاد العجائب في ضوء طبعة 1865 الأصلية

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Abstract:

This article examines the challenges of translating humour and nonsense in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) from English into Arabic. It draws on the princeps edition (Bodleian Library) to analyse the acculturation strategies adopted by Arab translators. Focusing on wordplay, parodic rhymes, and neologisms, it explores how Carroll's textual features are reconfigured within Arabic rhetorical norms. Particular attention is given to the tension between semantic fidelity and the preservation of humour. The study shows that literal equivalence is insufficient to convey the original text's effects. Instead, translators rely on transcreation, combining creative adaptation with compensatory strategies. It argues that acculturation requires a flexible approach capable of recreating the aesthetic logic of the source text while preserving its structural integrity.

Keywords: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; translation studies; acculturation; nonsense; literary humour; transcreation; English–Arabic translation.

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ملخص:

تناول هذه الدراسة إشكاليات ترجمة الفكاهة واللامعقول في رواية *أليس في بلاد العجائب* (*1865*) من الإنجليزية إلى العربية. وتعتمد على الطبعة الأميرية (مكتبة بودليان) مرجعًا أساسياً لتحليل استراتيجيات التثاقف التي يعتمدها المترجمون العرب. ومن خلال التركيز على التلاعب اللفظي، والأناشيد الساخرة، والألفاظ المستحدثة، تستكشف الدراسة كيفية إعادة تشكيل الخصائص النصية لدى كارول ضمن معايير البلاغة العربية. كما تولي اهتمامًا خاصًا للتوتر القائم بين الأمانة الدلالية والحفاظ على الطابع الفكاهي. وتبيّن الدراسة أن التكافؤ الحرفي غير كافٍ لنقل أثر النص الأصلي، إذ يلجأ المترجمون إلى الترجمة الإبداعية التي تجمع بين التكييف الخلاق واستراتيجيات التعويض. وتخلص إلى أن التثاقف في الترجمة الأدبية يتطلب مقاربة مرنة وتأملية قادرة على إعادة إنتاج البنية الجمالية للنص الأصلي مع الحفاظ على تكامله البنيوي.

كلمات مفتاحية: مغامرات أليس في بلاد العجائب؛ دراسات الترجمة؛ التثاقف؛ اللا معنى؛ الفكاهة الأدبية؛ الترجمة الإبداعية؛ الترجمة الإنجليزية—العربية.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in 1865, with illustrations by John Tenniel, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has occupied a central place in Victorian literature and has become a particularly challenging text for translation studies (Carroll, 1865; Gardner, 2000). Preserved in its original form at the Bodleian Library, the work is built on an aesthetics of nonsense in which humour is not simply ornamental, but deeply tied to disrupted

logic, linguistic play, and the sociocultural codes of nineteenth-century England (Hewson, 2015; Tigges, 1988).

Translating this work into Arabic places the translator in a complex process of acculturation. In this study, acculturation is understood as a form of cultural mediation through which the translator negotiates between a highly marked source text and a target literary system shaped by different rhetorical and stylistic conventions. In this sense, translation goes beyond semantic transfer and becomes a form of rewriting (Bassnett, 2014; Lefevere, 1992). The difficulty lies in the nature of nonsense itself: how can a text that deliberately destabilizes meaning be rendered in a language shaped by different traditions of wordplay, poetic expression, and literary coherence?

This study addresses the following question: how do the mechanisms of acculturation operate in the translation of Carrollian nonsense into Arabic, and what strategies emerge from this process of textual and cultural negotiation? More specifically, it examines how translators navigate the tension between preserving Victorian strangeness and ensuring intelligibility for the Arabic-speaking reader.

The study is based on the hypothesis that returning systematically to the 1865 original edition, rather than relying on simplified or intermediary versions, is essential to what may be called a form of controlled acculturation. Close reference to the source text makes it possible to identify the key sites of nonsense more accurately and to determine whether they call for domestication (Venuti, 1995), compensation, or creative transcreation.

To test this hypothesis, the article draws on a tripartite corpus: Lewis Carroll's original 1865 edition and two Arabic translations. The first is Nadia El-Khouly's 2013 translation,

produced within the institutional framework of the National Centre for Translation, and the second is Amira Kiwan's version, which reflects a more popularizing orientation. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study focuses on puns, parodic nursery rhymes, and absurd logical structures in order to identify both recurring translational patterns and significant divergences in the ways Carroll's nonsense is acculturated into Arabic, thus extending recent work on Arabic translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the role of cultural research in translation competence (Achouag, 2025).

2. Theoretical Framework: Acculturation and the Translation of Nonsense

The challenges posed by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to translation studies go far beyond linguistic transfer. They raise a broader question: to what extent can a target culture accommodate the radical otherness of a foreign system of thought? This section provides the conceptual framework for approaching translation as a process of acculturation, situated at the intersection of several major theoretical perspectives.

2.1 Acculturation and Cultural Transfer in Translation

Literary translation cannot be reduced to a neutral act of transfer; it is a form of "rewriting" shaped by cultural, ideological, and institutional forces (Lefevere, 1992). As Bhabha (1994) suggests, translation creates a "Third Space," a hybrid zone in which the source text and the target culture interact to produce new meanings. Within this space, translation is not a simple reproduction, but a process of transformation.

In this study, acculturation is understood as a mediating process that lies between assimilation and strict fidelity. It does not aim to erase the foreignness of the source text, nor to reproduce it mechanically, but to negotiate its presence within the target language so that it remains both meaningful and effective.

In this sense, acculturation is closely related to the idea of cultural transfer, yet it places greater emphasis on the translator's active role in shaping this transfer.

This tension is central to Venuti's (1995) distinction between domestication and foreignization. While domestication reduces textual strangeness in order to ensure fluency and readability, foreignization seeks to preserve it by resisting target-language norms. Acculturation, however, can be seen as a more flexible approach: rather than choosing one pole exclusively, it involves identifying strategies that preserve the aesthetic and functional effects of the source text, particularly humour, while allowing the text to function within the target culture (Bassnett, 2014). It is therefore less a fixed strategy than a process of continuous negotiation.

2.2 Carrollian Nonsense: Poetics, Humour, and Victorian Culture

Carroll's nonsense is not the absence of meaning, but a form of "metalogic" that destabilizes conventional patterns of reasoning and language (Tigges, 1988). As Gardner (2000) demonstrates, the text is deeply rooted in its cultural context: its wordplay, parodies, and rhythms draw on Victorian school culture, didactic poetry (notably Isaac Watts), and everyday idiomatic expressions.

From a translational perspective, these features represent some of the most resistant elements to transfer. As Delabastita (1996) argues, wordplay is structurally bound to the linguistic system in which it operates, making direct equivalence almost impossible. Translating such elements therefore requires more than lexical substitution; it often involves reformulation, compensation, or creative transformation.

This difficulty is further intensified by the cultural dimension of nonsense. For Hatim and Mason (1997), translation is always an act of cultural mediation in which meanings are shaped by ideological and social contexts. In the case of *Alice*, the translator must navigate between two systems: one that uses humour to subvert didactic discourse, and another governed by different literary conventions and expectations.

As Nabokov (1990) notes, the effectiveness of such texts often depends on shared cultural knowledge. Carrollian humour relies on recognition: the reader must identify what is being parodied for the effect to emerge fully. This creates a fundamental paradox for the translator: how can one render a parody of a culturally specific text, such as an English nursery rhyme, for an audience that does not share the same references? In this context, acculturation becomes a form of strategic decision-making, balancing explicitation with creative reconfiguration in order to preserve both intelligibility and playfulness.

2.3 Translated Literature in the Arabic Polysystem: Questions of Legitimacy

The position of translated literature within the Arabic literary field can be fruitfully examined through Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory (1990). In many Arab contexts, translated literature has traditionally occupied a peripheral position, shaped by the norms of fuṣḥā (Classical Arabic), which is associated with clarity, authority, and literary prestige.

Introducing nonsense into this system raises important questions of legitimacy. As Toury (1995) argues, translation is governed by norms of acceptability and adequacy. A translation that prioritizes adequacy, strict fidelity to the source text, may appear obscure or unconventional to the target audience. Conversely, a translation that prioritizes acceptability, by adapting to established literary norms, risks neutralizing the subversive and playful nature of nonsense.

In this context, acculturation functions as a strategic mechanism that allows translators to negotiate between these competing demands. By drawing on the expressive resources of Arabic, such as *jināS* (paronomasia) or other rhetorical devices, translators can recreate forms of linguistic play that resonate within the target culture while preserving the spirit of the original text. Acculturation thus does not eliminate difference, but reconfigures it, allowing nonsense to circulate within a new literary system without losing its disruptive potential.

3. Acculturating Strategies in the Translation of the Source Text

The translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into Arabic raises a fundamental problem of "translatability" in Benjamin's sense (1923), requiring the translator to act as a mediator between two distinct cultural and linguistic systems. Rather than a straightforward transfer, this process involves a series of strategic choices through which the translator negotiates between the expressive potential of English and the structural and rhetorical constraints of Arabic.

In this perspective, four main strategies can be identified, each reflecting a different way of managing linguistic and cultural difference.

3.1 Cultural Adaptation: From Victorian Referents to Arabic Contexts

Cultural adaptation, often associated with domestication (Venuti, 1995), consists in replacing culturally specific elements of the source text with more familiar references in the target culture. In *Alice*, this primarily concerns aspects of Victorian everyday life, such as food, social rituals, or educational practices, that may not resonate with an Arab readership.

A key example is the "Tea Party," which raises the question of whether it should be preserved as a specifically British cultural practice or adapted into a more recognizable form of social interaction. Such decisions are guided by what Toury (1995) terms acceptability, as they aim to facilitate the reader's engagement with the text by reducing excessive cultural distance.

However, adaptation is not without risk. While it enhances accessibility, it may also attenuate the cultural specificity of the source text. It therefore requires careful calibration in order to maintain a balance between familiarity and foreignness.

3.2 Transcreation and Playful Recreation: The Challenge of Neologisms

When semantic equivalence proves insufficient, particularly in cases of neologisms or pure nonsense, transcreation becomes necessary. As Tigges (1988) points out, nonsense is not primarily about meaning, but about effect: what must be translated is the disruption it produces.

In Arabic, this task is especially demanding due to the structural specificity of the language. The translator must often rely on the triliteral root system to create new lexical forms that appear morphologically plausible while remaining semantically unstable or playful. This process requires both linguistic sensitivity and creative freedom.

Transcreation thus represents a central form of acculturation. Rather than reproducing the source text, it recreates its effects by mobilizing the poetic and morphological resources of the target language. In doing so, it allows Carroll's linguistic inventiveness to be reimagined within an Arabic framework.

3.3 Explicitation and Compensation: Managing Jinās (جناس)

Explicitation involves the addition of clarifying elements, such as glosses or explanatory notes, to make culturally or

linguistically opaque passages more accessible. While this strategy may be necessary in certain contexts, it can also disrupt the immediacy of Carrollian humour, which often depends on surprise and ambiguity.

To address this limitation, translators may resort to compensation (Lefevere, 1992). When a specific effect, such as an English pun based on homonymy, cannot be reproduced directly, it can be recreated elsewhere through different means. In Arabic, this often involves the use of rhetorical devices such as *jināS* (paronomasia) or *sajʿ* (rhymed prose).

This approach shifts the focus from local equivalence to global effect. Rather than reproducing each element individually, the translator seeks to preserve what might be called the overall "nonsense density" of the text. Compensation thus plays a crucial role in maintaining the stylistic and aesthetic balance of the translation.

3.4 Arbitration between Semantic Fidelity and Pragmatic Effect

Ultimately, acculturation involves a series of pragmatic decisions through which the translator negotiates between competing priorities. One of the central tensions lies between:

- Semantic fidelity, which aims to preserve the literal meaning and structure of the source text, even at the risk of producing a text that appears rigid or opaque;
- Pragmatic effect, which seeks to elicit in the target reader a response, laughter, surprise, or disorientation, comparable to that of the original audience, even if this requires departures from the source text.

These choices reflect the translator's ethical and interpretive stance. As Bassnett (2014) suggests, successful

translation depends on achieving a form of functional equivalence, in which the effect of the text is preserved rather than its exact form.

In the case of *Alice*, this means that the sense of logical disruption and playful instability experienced by the English reader should be recreated for the Arabic reader, through the use of linguistic and rhetorical resources specific to Arabic. Acculturation, in this sense, is not a compromise, but a dynamic process of reconfiguration that allows the text to remain both foreign and intelligible.

4. Case Study: Comparative Analysis of Emblematic Passages

This section implements the analytical framework outlined earlier by confronting theoretical models of acculturation with concrete translational practices. Through a selection of key passages, chosen for their semantic resistance and their grounding in the 1865 princeps edition, we examine how Nadia El-Khouly and Amira Kiwan negotiate the transfer of Carrollian nonsense into Arabic.

Adopting a qualitative and micro-analytical approach, this section focuses on moments where meaning is particularly unstable: wordplay, visual experimentation, and intertextual parody. These passages function as critical testing grounds for translation strategies such as compensation, explicitation, and transcreation. The comparison allows us to assess not only the translators' choices, but also the extent to which these choices succeed in preserving the aesthetic and pragmatic effects of the source text.

4.1 Visual and Homophonic Wordplay: "Tail / Tale" (Chap. 3)

This section implements the analytical framework outlined earlier by confronting theoretical models of acculturation with concrete translational practices. Through a selection of key passages, chosen for their semantic resistance and their grounding

in the 1865 princeps edition, we examine how Nadia El-Khouly and Amira Kiwan negotiate the transfer of Carrollian nonsense into Arabic.

Source text (1865):

"Mine is a long and a sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

"It is a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail.

A. The Nonsense Pivot

The nonsense in this passage is structured around a perfect homophony between *tale* (story) and *tail* (animal appendage). Carroll exploits this phonetic coincidence to produce a dual reading: the Mouse speaks in a narrative register, referring to its life story, while Alice interprets the utterance literally, focusing on the visible object.

This ambiguity is further reinforced by the typographical layout of the 1865 edition, where the Mouse's "tale" is presented as a calligram shaped like a tail. The reader is thus invited to engage simultaneously with language and visual form. Nonsense here operates at the intersection of sound, meaning, and graphic representation.

B. Nadia El-Khouly's Strategy: Visual Compensation

قال الفار وهو يلتف إلى أليس متنهدا: "ان حكايتي طويلة وحزينة، مثلها مثل ذيلي". (1)

فقالت أليس وهي تنظر باستغراب إلى ذيل الفار: "إنه ذيل طويل بالتأكيد ولكن لماذا تقول إنه حزين".

وقد بقيت تفكر في ذلك والفار يتحدث..

(1) ترتب السطور على هيئة ذيل فأر. أنظر الأصل Tale/tail

Strategy. El-Khouly acknowledges that the homophony cannot be reproduced in Arabic (*ḥikāya* vs. *dhayl*). Rather than forcing an artificial equivalence, she introduces a semantic bridge ("like my tail") and shifts the effect toward the visual dimension by preserving the calligram, accompanied by a brief explanatory note.

Humorous effect. The humour is displaced from the phonetic level to the visual one. The reader perceives the absurdity through the shape of the text, which recreates the playful logic of the original despite the loss of sound-based ambiguity.

Acculturative scope. This strategy reflects a form of functional adequacy (Toury, 1995). It preserves the experimental nature of Carroll's writing while adapting it to the constraints of Arabic script. The right-to-left orientation introduces a subtle transformation, producing what might be described as a "reconfigured calligram" rather than a direct reproduction.

C. Amira Kiwan's Strategy: Didactic Explicitation

قال الفار وهو يلتف إلى أليس متنهدا: "ان قصتي (tale) هي قصة طويلة وحزينة!"

فقالت أليس وهي تنظر باستغراب إلى ذيل (tail) الفار: «إنه ذيل طويل بالتأكيد؛ لكن لماذا تقول إنه حزين؟". وقد بقيت تفكر فيه، بينما كان الفار يتحدث.

Strategy. Kiwan resorts to parenthetical explicitation, inserting the English terms directly into the Arabic text.

Humorous effect. The comic mechanism is weakened. Instead of experiencing ambiguity, the reader is informed about it. The passage shifts from narrative play to linguistic explanation, interrupting the immersive quality of the text.

Acculturative scope. This approach aligns with an overt form of foreignization (Venuti, 1995). By exposing the untranslatability of the pun, Kiwan foregrounds the act of translation itself. However, this comes at the cost of narrative

continuity and aesthetic coherence.

D. Synthesis: Preserving the "Alice Effect"

From a translational perspective, El-Khouly's version more effectively preserves the pragmatic function of humour. In nonsense literature, meaning is inseparable from effect: what matters is not the mechanism itself, but the reader's experience of surprise and disorientation.

By contrast, Kiwan's strategy, although transparent and pedagogical, tends to neutralize the playful dimension of the text. Her explicitation clarifies the ambiguity but eliminates its performative force.

This example illustrates a broader principle: in translating nonsense, fidelity must often be understood in functional rather than formal terms. El-Khouly achieves a form of aesthetic acculturation, recreating the spirit of Carroll's experiment within the semiotic resources of Arabic.

While this first example highlights the challenges of phonetic and visual wordplay, the next case shifts the focus toward intertextuality and sound. The problem is no longer how to reproduce a pun, but how to translate a parody that depends on the reader's familiarity with a specific cultural text.

4.2 Parodic Nursery Rhyme: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat" (Chap. 7)

Source text (1865):

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you're at!
Up above the world you fly,
Like a tea-tray in the sky.

A. The Nonsense Pivot: Subverting an Intertext

This passage is based on the parody of a well-known English nursery rhyme, *The Star* (Jane Taylor, 1806). Carroll subverts the original by replacing the reassuring image of the star with a bat, and the celestial metaphor with a domestic object (the tea-tray).

Nonsense emerges from the tension between a familiar rhythmic structure and an incongruous semantic field. The reader recognizes the form, but the content disrupts expectations, producing a destabilizing comic effect.

B. Nadia El-Khouly's Strategy: Rhythmic Transcreation

"المع، المع، يا وطواط
طر واطلع في السما
زي صينية فيها شاي
اطلع رفرف في السما
المع، المع–"

Strategy. El-Khouly adopts a strategy of rhythmic and phonetic transcreation. By choosing المع("shine/twinkle"), she recreates the repetitive and musical quality of the original rhyme. The translation maintains both the absurd imagery and the performative rhythm.

Humorous effect. The humour becomes immediate and self-sufficient. Even without knowledge of the original rhyme, the reader perceives the playful contrast between the bat and the tea-tray. The sing-song quality reinforces the absurdity.

Acculturative scope. This strategy reflects a form of functional naturalization. The text reads like an Arabic children's rhyme, ensuring accessibility and engagement, even though the intertextual dimension of parody is partially lost.

C. Amira Kiwan's Strategy: Semantic Explicitation

تحرك بسرعة، تحرك بسرعة، أيها الخفاش الصغير!
كم أتساءل ما الذي أنت تفعله؟
فوق، في أعلى الدنيا تطير،
مثل صينيه شاي في السماء.
تحرك بسرعة تحرك بسرعة...".

Strategy. Kiwan prioritizes semantic clarity over poetic form. By translating *twinkle* as *تحرك بسرعة* ("move quickly"), she shifts from a visual/light-based image to a kinetic one, altering the nature of the metaphor.

Humorous effect. The loss of rhythm significantly reduces the comic impact. The passage becomes descriptive rather than performative, and the nursery rhyme structure is no longer recognizable.

Acculturative scope. This approach corresponds to a form of literal transfer that preserves meaning but not genre. As a result, the text loses its musical and cultural resonance.

D. Synthesis: The Problem of Intertextual Void

The comparison highlights a fundamental issue: the absence of a shared intertext in the target culture. Carroll's parody relies on the reader's familiarity with *The Star*, a reference that is largely absent in the Arab cultural context.

El-Khouly circumvents this problem by prioritizing rhythm and playfulness, effectively recreating the function of the rhyme. Kiwan, by contrast, preserves semantic content but fails to reproduce the generic and affective dimensions of the text.

This situation points to what may be called an "intertextual

void": when the source reference is not part of the target culture's collective memory, parody becomes difficult, if not impossible, to transfer directly. In such cases, the translator must choose between recreating the effect (through transcreation) or preserving the reference (through explicitation).

Ultimately, this example shows that the translation of nonsense depends not only on linguistic competence, but also on the circulation of cultural forms. Where such circulation is absent, translation becomes an act of creative reconstruction rather than reproduction.

4.3 The Nursery Rhyme: "How doth the little crocodile" (Chap. 2)

Source text (1865):

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

A. The Nonsense Pivot: Subversion of the Work Ethic

This poem constitutes a direct parody of Isaac Watts's didactic poem *Against Idleness and Mischief* (1715), a foundational text of Victorian moral education celebrating the industrious bee ("How doth the little busy bee"). Carroll introduces a deliberate and ironic distortion: the virtuous bee is replaced by a Nile crocodile, depicted as a self-satisfied and predatory creature.

The humour emerges from this inversion. A moral lesson about diligence is transformed into a celebration of a dangerous animal, thereby undermining the ethical seriousness of the original. The nonsense lies in the tension between the elevated didactic tone and the unsettling natural reality it describes.

From a cultural perspective, the passage draws on the Victorian tradition of moralising poetry, only to subvert it. The

result is a form of ironic dissonance, where the rhetoric of virtue coexists with imagery associated with violence and instinct.

B. Nadia El-Khouly's Strategy: Acculturation through Popular Versification

ديلك يا تمساح يا صغير
لونه بيلمع وبيتغير
وهو في النيل بيعوم
وانت يا تمساح بفكك
بتاكل كل السمكمك

Strategy. El-Khouly adopts a strategy of functional equivalence grounded in rhythmic and cultural adaptation. She uses a register close to Egyptian Arabic (āmmiyya), characterised by strong musicality and oral resonance (e.g., *deilak*, *biyilmaʿ*). The use of rhyme and playful lexical choices (*samakmak*) evokes the aesthetics of popular children's verse and oral storytelling.

Humorous effect. Humour is primarily conveyed through rhythm and sound. The threatening dimension of the crocodile is softened, giving way to a playful and almost folkloric tone. The reader engages with the text as a lively rhyme rather than as a parody of a moral poem.

Acculturative scope. This approach reflects a clear strategy of domestication (Venuti, 1995). By relocating the poem within a familiar poetic register and reinforcing the Nile as a shared cultural reference, El-Khouly produces a text that feels culturally immediate. However, this gain in accessibility comes at the expense of the original's satirical critique of Victorian moral discourse.

C. Amira Kiwan's Strategy: Literal and Erudite Adequacy

كيف يمكن للتمساح الصغير
أن يحسن ذيله اللامع،
ويصب مياه النيل
فوق كل صفيحة ذهبية.

Strategy. Kiwan adopts a predominantly semantic approach, favouring lexical precision and syntactic clarity. Her use of fuṣḥā and formal structures preserves the surface meaning of the original text while maintaining an elevated register.

Humorous effect. The poetic and comic dimensions are significantly reduced. Without rhythm or performative qualities, the text reads more like a descriptive statement than a playful parody. The contrast between form and content, central to the original effect, is largely neutralised.

Acculturative scope. This strategy corresponds to a form of passive foreignization. While it respects the semantic structure of the source text, it does not provide the interpretive tools necessary for the target reader to grasp its satirical dimension. The absence of the Isaac Watts intertext further limits its accessibility.

D. Synthesis: Between Fluency and Moral Subversion

This example highlights a clear divergence in translational orientation. El-Khouly compensates for the loss of the original intertext through stylistic creativity, privileging rhythm and reader engagement. Kiwan, by contrast, remains closer to the lexical and syntactic structure of the source text, at the cost of its pragmatic and aesthetic effect.

More broadly, this case demonstrates that translating parody requires more than semantic accuracy: it involves recreating a literary function. In the absence of a shared cultural reference, the translator must decide whether to preserve the

structure of the original or to reproduce its effect.

In this respect, El-Khouly effectively transforms the Victorian moral poem into a form closer to a popular animal rhyme, enabling the reader to experience a comparable sense of playfulness. Kiwan's version, although linguistically faithful, remains interpretively distant.

While the crocodile poem illustrates the challenges of translating parodic verse and moral subversion, Carroll's nonsense also operates at the level of dialogue. In the following example, the difficulty lies no longer in rhythm or intertextuality, but in the disruption of conversational logic. The Mad Hatter scene thus shifts the focus from poetic parody to pragmatic nonsense.

4.4 The Mad Hatter Scene: Puns and Absurdities (Chap. 7)

Source text (1865):

"Why is a raven like a writing-desk? […]
"Really, now you ask me," said Alice, very much confused, "I don't think."
"Then you shouldn't talk," said the Hatter.

A. The Nonsense Pivot: Disruption of Conversational Logic

This passage relies on two key mechanisms of absurdity. First, the riddle without an answer ("Why is a raven like a writing-desk?") subverts the conventions of the genre, which typically presupposes a solution. Second, the exchange between Alice and the Hatter is based on a linguistic misinterpretation: Alice uses "I don't think" idiomatically, whereas the Hatter interprets it literally, as a lack of thought.

The humour thus arises from a breakdown in communication. Logical reasoning and conversational norms are deliberately destabilised, producing a form of pragmatic

nonsense.

B. Nadia El-Khouly's Strategy: Concision and Structural Fidelity

لماذا يشبه الغراب مائدة الكتابة/.../ قالت أليس بارتباك بالغ: "ماذا تقول؟ لا أعتقد! قال صانع القبعات: "إذا يجب أن تلزمي الصمت."

Strategy. El-Khouly adopts a concise and structurally faithful approach. She preserves the ambiguity of Alice's reply and the abruptness of the Hatter's response, maintaining the rhythm of the original exchange.

Humorous effect. The humour is preserved through brevity and timing. The rapid progression of the dialogue reinforces the absurdity, while the lack of explanation allows the misunderstanding to remain effective.

Acculturative scope. This strategy reflects a form of neutral foreignization. Rather than adapting the dialogue, El-Khouly retains its strangeness, relying on the reader's ability to interpret the communicative breakdown.

C. Amira Kiwan's Strategy: Expressive Expansion

لماذا يشبه الغراب منضدة الكتابة/.../ قالت أليس بارتباك بالغ: " حقا! الآن تسألني؟ لا أعتقد!". قال صاحب القبعات. "إذا يجب أن لا تتكلمي".

Strategy. Kiwan introduces additional expressive elements, expanding Alice's response to clarify her emotional state. This results in a more explicit and dramatized interaction.

Humorous effect. The comic effect is weakened by this expansion. The added explanations slow down the exchange and reduce the sharpness of the punchline. The scene becomes more psychological than absurd.

Acculturative scope. This approach reflects a tendency toward domestication through emotional clarification. However,

by making the dialogue more explicit, it diminishes the disruptive quality that defines Carrollian nonsense.

D. Synthesis: Preserving Rupture

This example underscores the importance of preserving communicative rupture in the translation of nonsense. El-Khouly's version maintains the structural minimalism of the original, allowing absurdity to emerge naturally. Kiwan's version, while more explicit, tends to normalise the interaction.

Ultimately, the success of this passage lies not in lexical precision but in the preservation of logical instability. Nonsense operates through breakdown, not coherence; translating it therefore requires restraint rather than elaboration.

If the Mad Hatter scene foregrounds the disruption of dialogue, the final example returns to poetic form, this time in a more performative and rhythmic dimension. The *Lobster Quadrille* raises the question of whether translation can reproduce not only meaning and humour, but also movement and musicality.

4.5 Translating the Poem: "The Lobster Quadrille" (Chap. 10)

Source text (1865):

"Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to a snail.
"There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.
See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!
They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance?
Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?"

A. The Nonsense Pivot: Choreographic Rhythm and Parody

This poem draws on the structure of call-and-response songs as well as Victorian ballroom dance culture. Its nonsense

lies both in the absurdity of the situation, a fish urging a snail to hurry because of a threatening porpoise, and in the insistent repetition of the refrain ("Will you, won't you…"), which mimics the rhythm of dance.

Carroll also subtly parodies Mary Howitt's *The Spider and the Fly*, replacing a predatory trap with an invitation that is at once playful and coercive. The effect is ambivalent: what appears to be festive gradually reveals an underlying tension.

Culturally, the poem is anchored in maritime parody ballads, whose metre evokes both the movement of waves and the cadence of dance. Nonsense here is not only semantic but kinetic: it is embedded in rhythm, repetition, and performative energy.

B. Nadia El-Khouly's Strategy: Popular and Performative Transcreation

قال السمك الأبيض للحلزون:

" ياللا امشي بسرعة شوية"

قالت له السمكة البيضة" :

فيه درفيلة جايه عليه

وفوق ديلي دايسة بقوة

بص وشوف الإستاكوزا

بص وشوف الرنيلا

جريوا بسرعة عننا

ووصلوا الشط قبلنا"

ياله تعالى وارقص هنا

ح ترقص اه، ح ترقص لا

ياله ارقص عندنا

لما نوصل ح يشيلونا

وفي الهوا ح يطيرونا

Strategy. El-Khouly adopts a strongly marked strategy of dialectal acculturation. Through expressions such as *yalla imshi* and *baṣṣ w-šūf*, she relocates the poem within the rhythm and texture of Egyptian popular verse (ʿāmmiyya). Internal rhyme, repetition, and onomatopoeic patterns compensate for the loss of the original English metre and cultural references.

Humorous effect. The humour becomes distinctly performative. The text invites not only reading but also vocalisation, even participation. The juxtaposition of familiar colloquial language with an absurd marine scenario enhances the comic effect and creates an immediate connection with the reader.

Acculturative scope. This approach can be described as radical transcreation. El-Khouly does not aim to reproduce the original form, but to recreate its function. In doing so, she "re-roots" the text within the target culture. While some semantic precision is sacrificed (e.g., the porpoise rendered as a more generic *darfīla*), the essential qualities of rhythm, playfulness, and movement are preserved.

C. Amira Kiwan's Strategy: Formal Elegance and Classical Register

لن نذهبَ للماءِ بعدَ الآنْ

إن لم تُسرعْ يا حلزونُ، الآنْ

فالدّلفينُ وراءَنا يسيرُ بلا هَوَانْ

ويدوسُ على ذيلي بلا أمانْ

أُنظرْ كيفَ الاستاكوزا والسلاحفُ يتقدّمون فرحينْ

ينتظرونَ على الشاطئِ، فهل تلتحقُ بنا في الرقصِ مع الباقينْ؟
هيّا، ألا ترقص؟ هيّا، ألا ترقص؟ هل سترقص وترقص كالجميع؟

Strategy. Kiwan remains within the framework of fuṣḥā, privileging lexical precision and syntactic balance. Her translation demonstrates a concern for stylistic elegance and coherence, producing a text that aligns with the norms of classical Arabic literary discourse.

Humorous effect. Here, humour takes on a more restrained and literary form. It emerges from subtle irony, particularly in the polite insistence of the fish. However, the attenuation of repetition, especially the binary rhythm of "Will you, won't you", reduces the hypnotic and dance-like quality of the original.

Acculturative scope. Kiwan's approach may be described as an acculturation "from above." By integrating the text into the canon of classical Arabic, she confers legitimacy and stability upon it. Yet this strategy also risks smoothing out the disruptive and playful dimensions that define Carrollian nonsense.

D. Synthesis: Between Popular Performance and Literary Refinement

This comparison clearly reflects the dynamics described by Polysystem Theory (Toury, 1995). The two translations occupy different positions within the literary system:

- El-Khouly aligns the text with a "peripheral" system (oral, popular), thereby preserving its energy, rhythm, and immediacy.
- Kiwan situates it within the "central" system (classical, institutional), prioritising linguistic refinement and textual stability.

More broadly, this contrast illustrates two distinct

conceptions of translation. El-Khouly privileges the experiential dimension of the text: her translation seeks to be felt, heard, and even performed. Kiwan, by contrast, foregrounds readability and literary coherence, offering a version that is intellectually accessible but less dynamically engaging.

In this respect, El-Khouly more successfully achieves what may be termed *emotional acculturation*. She understands that, for the reader to "join the dance," the poem must not only be understood but also embodied as a rhythmic and playful experience. Translation here becomes not just an act of transfer, but an invitation to participate.

5. Discussion

The comparative analysis of the five selected passages reveals a consistent methodological divergence. The translational choices made by Nadia El-Khouly and Amira Kiwan are not incidental; rather, they reflect two distinct and coherent translational orientations.

5.1 Translational Orientations: Between Semantic Fidelity and Pragmatic Effect

The corpus highlights a clear and recurring duality. As illustrated in the cases of the *Crocodile* (parody of moral discourse) and the *Quadrille* (parody of movement and rhythm), the two translators operate according to different priorities:

> **Amira Kiwan's approach** may be described as an *ethics of the letter*. By privileging semantic accuracy and preserving formal features through fuṣḥā, she positions the text as a foreign literary object. Her translation tends to foreground the source culture, inviting the Arabic reader to engage with Victorian otherness. However, this choice often comes at the expense of immediacy, particularly in

passages where humour depends on rhythm, sound, or performance.

Nadia El-Khouly's approach, by contrast, reflects an *ethics of effect*. Through the use of rhythm, dialect, and rhetorical devices drawn from Arabic balāgha, she seeks to recreate the experiential dimension of nonsense. Her priority is not the preservation of form as such, but the transmission of its playful and performative impact. In this sense, her translations tend to reconfigure the text as a living literary experience rather than a historical artefact.

This opposition does not simply reflect two stylistic preferences; it points to a deeper tension within translation studies between fidelity to the source and responsiveness to the target audience. This tension also resonates with functionalist approaches to literary translation, which emphasize the translator's role in negotiating between textual form, reader reception, and the communicative purpose of the translated work (Amirat, 2025).

5.2 Arabic Rhetoric (Balāgha) as a Compensatory Resource

The analysis also demonstrates that successful acculturation into Arabic often depends on the mobilisation of classical rhetorical resources. Faced with the structural untranslatability of English wordplay, translators, particularly El-Khouly, resort to compensatory strategies rooted in Arabic poetics:

JināS (جناس) enables the recreation of phonetic play by exploiting sound correspondences across different lexical roots, thereby approximating the effect of English puns.

Sajʿ (سجع), or rhymed prose, compensates for the loss of metre and musicality, especially in nursery rhymes and poetic passages.

These strategies suggest that translation is not merely a process of loss, but also one of transformation. Rather than attempting to replicate the source text mechanically, the translator activates the expressive potential of the target language. In this way, balāgha functions not only as a stylistic tool, but as a key mechanism of creative mediation.

5.3 The "Third Space": Alice as a Hybrid Figure

From the perspective of Homi Bhabha's concept of the *Third Space* (1994), the Arabic translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can be understood as sites of hybridity. The translated text is neither fully Victorian nor fully Arab; instead, it occupies an intermediate position where meanings are renegotiated.

Alice thus emerges as a hybrid figure: an English character who speaks through the linguistic and rhetorical resources of Arabic. This hybridisation does not dilute the text; rather, it enables its transformation into a trans-cultural literary object.

In this "in-between" space, nonsense loses its status as a culturally specific oddity and becomes a more universal mode of expression. Its capacity to disrupt logic and language proves adaptable across linguistic systems, provided that the translator succeeds in reactivating its underlying mechanisms.

5.4 Limits of Acculturation and the Risk of Over-Domestication

Despite its potential, acculturation also entails certain risks. When domestication becomes excessive, the foreignness of the text may be significantly reduced. In such cases, the translation risks becoming overly smooth, losing the unsettling quality that is central to Carroll's writing.

Two main limitations can be identified:

The limits of parody. As shown by the phenomenon of the *intertextual void*, acculturation reaches its limits when the target culture lacks an equivalent reference framework. Without shared cultural knowledge, parody cannot be fully reconstructed, and must instead be approximated or replaced.

The need for balance. The findings of this study suggest that effective translation of nonsense requires a dynamic equilibrium. Neither strict literalism nor complete adaptation is sufficient on its own. Rather, translation operates as a pendular movement between two poles: respect for the source text (as exemplified by Kiwan) and activation of the target language's creative resources (as demonstrated by El-Khouly).

In this sense, the translator's task is not to resolve this tension, but to negotiate it. The value of translation lies precisely in this space of negotiation, where meaning, form, and effect are continuously reconfigured.

6. CONCLUSION

This study of acculturation in the Arabic translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has shown that the preservation of Carrollian humour and singularity cannot be reduced to lexical equivalence. Rather, it emerges from an ongoing process of cultural negotiation, in which meaning, form, and effect are constantly reconfigured. By examining the translations of Nadia El-Khouly and Amira Kiwan in relation to the 1865 original edition, several key insights can be drawn.

6.1 Main Findings: A Duality of Translational Postures

The analysis reveals two distinct translational orientations. On the one hand, a semantic and text-oriented approach (Kiwan) that prioritises fidelity to the structures of the source language, presenting the work as a foreign and culturally marked literary

object. On the other hand, a pragmatic and creative approach (El-Khouly) that mobilises rhythm, dialect, and popular poetic forms in order to preserve the experiential dimension of nonsense.

This duality highlights a central tension in the translation of literary humour: whether the translator should aim to explain strangeness or to reproduce its effect. In the case of nonsense, the latter often proves more decisive, as meaning is inseparable from the reader's experience of disruption and play.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution: Balāgha as a Resource for Translation

From a theoretical perspective, this study underscores the importance of Arabic rhetorical traditions (balāgha) as a resource for translation. Devices such as **jināS** (جناس) and **sajʿ** (سجع) are not merely ornamental; they function as compensatory mechanisms that allow the translator to recreate, within the Arabic language, the effects of homophony, rhythm, and musicality central to Carroll's writing.

In this process, *Alice* becomes what Homi Bhabha describes as a *Third Space*: a site of hybridity where the creative logic of the source text intersects with the expressive potential of the target language. Translation thus appears not as a secondary act, but as a space of literary production in its own right.

6.3 Pedagogical Implications: Training Translators as Cultural Mediators

The findings also carry important pedagogical implications. Literary translation cannot be reduced to the acquisition of linguistic competence; it requires the development of interpretive and creative skills. Training translators as cultural mediators involves equipping them with the ability to identify the "pivots" of a text, those points where meaning, form, and effect

converge.

Pedagogical practices such as comparative analysis of translations, as well as creative rewriting exercises, can help students navigate the tension between fidelity to the letter and fidelity to the spirit. In this sense, translation pedagogy must foster not only accuracy, but also critical awareness and aesthetic sensitivity.

6.4 Perspectives: Extending the Scope of Research

While this study has focused on two Arabic translations, it opens several avenues for further research. A comparative investigation of *Alice* in other linguistic and cultural contexts, such as Persian or Urdu, would provide valuable insights into how different literary systems negotiate the challenges of nonsense.

Moreover, the evolution of global cultural references, including adaptations in music, animation, and children's literature, may gradually reduce what has been described here as the "intertextual void." As certain texts become more widely shared across cultures, new possibilities for translating parody and intertextual humour may emerge.

Final Remarks

Ultimately, the acculturated translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* offers a compelling model for rethinking literary translation. It suggests that the translator is not merely a mediator of meaning, but an active participant in the creation of new literary forms.

By preserving both the strangeness and the vitality of the source text, while making it accessible within a new cultural horizon, translation becomes a space of encounter, one in which difference is not erased, but reimagined and made meaningful.

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