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Translating idiomatic expressions in children's literature: A case study of rendering *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic

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Abstract

Idiomatic expressions are challenging for translators of different genres, especially children's literature, as they need proper strategies to ensure an age-appropriate and easily comprehensible meaning. This study examined the strategies that the translators employed in rendering idiomatic expressions in Kenny's children's series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic. To achieve the purpose of the study, idiomatic expressions were collected from four books of the series, namely, *Rodrick Rules*, *Greg Heffley's Journal*, *The Last Straw*, and *Cabin Fever*, and compared to their Arabic translations. The data were categorized according to Baker's (1992) four strategies for dealing with idiomatic expressions, with a fifth strategy, literal translation, added to the analysis. The study found that there was a clear preference for paraphrasing when translating idioms from English into Arabic. English idioms were primarily used in informal contexts, which adds to the challenge of translating them, as standard Arabic, the variety used in the translated version, is generally more suited to a formal style in written texts. This study can be useful for scholars and researchers in the field of children's literature to deepen their understanding of the challenges and strategies associated with translating idioms. It can also help educators and curriculum developers promote multilingualism and cross-cultural appreciation among young readers.

Keywords: children's literature, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, translation strategies, idiomatic expressions



Public Interest Statement

Idiomatic expressions are challenging for translators of different genres, especially children's literature, as they need proper strategies to ensure an age-appropriate and easily comprehensible meaning. Among the popular children's book series that captivated young readers worldwide is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. This series is an excellent choice for research due to the abundance of idioms it contains. Understanding how idioms are rendered for Arabic speakers is crucial, taking into account that the target audience consists mainly of children who may not be familiar with these expressions. This study sheds light on the strategies translators used to adapt idiomatic expressions into Arabic, ensuring they remain comprehensible and entertaining for young readers.

1. Introduction

Children's literature has long been dismissed and was not a concern of high art and culture being directed at a minority of young readers. It was only till the 1950s that this area was fully recognized as a distinctive genre of the literary world (Hunt, 1994). As societies become increasingly interconnected, there rises the need for cross-cultural influence and the international spreading of children's literature. This can be achieved through translation which functions as a bridge between cultures and can foster understanding and enrich the imaginations of young minds.

Children's literature is thought to have certain features that make its translation a difficult endeavor. Desmidt (2006) highlights the complexity of the norms that shape the specific communication process involved in children's literature, including source text-related norms, literary aesthetic norms, business norms, didactic norms, pedagogical norms, and technical norms. The first two categories are addressed at adequacy and acceptability whereas business norms are linked to the context of editing, publishing, and distribution. Didactic and pedagogic norms relate to two functions that distinguish children's literature, namely, children's books must educate children and should be adapted to be comprehensible to children. Finally, technical norms determine the layout, including the synthesis between text and image characteristics of translated children's books. Because of the culturally specific status of children's literature, adaptation and domestication must be part and parcel of the translation process; more precisely, "translators of children's literature should reach out to the children of their own culture" (Oittinen, 2000, p. 168).

One of the paramount challenges in translating children's literature lies in understanding their cognitive ability to ensure that the translated work is not only linguistically accessible but also cognitively engaging and age-appropriate (Nord, 1991) This entails meticulously examining language and style to evoke the same emotional responses, laughter, and wonder as the original text.

Among the popular children's book series that captivated young readers worldwide and received significant attention and many rewards since its first online release in 2004 is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. The books were written and illustrated by the American author Jeff Kinney and were narrated by Greg Heffley, a middle-schooler who outlines the events and adventures of his daily life in a diary. As of 2023, 18 books in the series have been released, most of which were translated into Arabic by Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc. under the title *بلاط تارك ذم* (Diary of a Student).

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is known for its unique writing style, featuring a conversational tone, humor, and a distinctive combination of narrative text and cartoon-style illustrations. Although the language employed in all books is accessible and geared towards young readers, culture-specific elements such as idioms remain challenging for translators, especially when rendered into other languages. Hence, this study seeks to unravel the strategies the translators adopted to overcome the complexities of translating idiomatic expressions in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic. It mainly answers the following question:

What are the translation strategies employed in rendering idiomatic expressions in the Children's series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic?

2. Literature Review

This section explores several aspects related to translating children's literature and sheds light on the challenges and strategies employed by translators when translating idiomatic expressions. Finally, it presents empirical studies with related content.

2.1 *Translating Children's Literature*

Translating children's books is viewed as the best way to introduce young readers to diverse cultures and is an ideal means for "weaving world understanding" (Joels, 1999, p. 65). It can introduce new genres and styles or even revitalize already-existing genres, in addition to presenting an alternative view of the world that goes against dominant ideas, stereotypes, norms, or values (Van Coillie, 2020). According to Pascua (2003, p. 276), translating children's books can shape "a new educational policy needed to overcome so much hostility toward the foreign, the strange, 'the other'". However, one may wonder how much of the 'other' culture can be preserved in the translation. Here, translators must decide whether to stay close to the source text (ST) or adapt the text for a new audience. This choice between foreignization or domestication can be made for the entire text, or individual textual elements. This decision is far more crucial when translating for kids as translators must consider the audience more carefully due to the age and experience gap with their readers. What makes the task even more complicated is that translators should be guided not only by textual or literary norms but also by didactic and pedagogic ones (Desmidt, 2006).

It can be said that translators who eliminate the foreignness in their ST often assume that children are not yet developed enough linguistically, literarily, or culturally to understand or perceive foreign elements, which may diminish the pleasure of reading. On the other hand, translators who decide to preserve the foreignness in the ST often do so because they believe that exposure to the foreign is enriching and that children can tolerate some degree of strangeness (Van Coillie, 2020).

In fact, many researchers state that translators for children are far more inclined than translators for adults to remove foreign elements in a text, or replace them with elements from the target culture (see Oittinen, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2005; Alvstad, 2010; Lathey, 2010). This paper investigates how translators deal with culture-specific elements in texts, particularly idioms, in the context of translating children's literature.

2.2 *Challenges and Strategies of Translating Idiomatic Expressions*

One of the challenges that translators should deal with is translating idioms. According to Larson (1998, p. 23), an idiom is "a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words". These expressions usually encompass a variety of elements, such as cultural characteristics, religious beliefs, objects unique to a particular culture, superstitions, and the diverse ideologies of people from other societies (Al Saideen, Haider, & Al-Abbas, 2022; Rababah & Al-Abbas, 2022).

While idiomatic expressions can be exciting and artistic, they can be difficult to understand for translators or non-native speakers since their meanings are often figurative rather than literal (Shuhaiber & Haider, 2023). When rendering idioms, translators try first to find an identical idiom equivalent in the target language (TL). However, according to Baker (1992, pp. 75-76), translating idioms involves more than just finding a direct equivalent; other considerations also are at play, such as: "the significance of the specific lexical items which constitute the idiom" and "the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using idiomatic language in a given register in the target language". In all cases, the context in which an idiom is translated is crucial to determine which strategy is acceptable or unacceptable.

To overcome the difficulties of translating idioms, Baker (1992) suggested the following four strategies:

- 1- Using an idiom with similar meaning and form in which the target text (TT) expression mirrors the one in the ST in terms of meaning and lexical components. An example of this strategy is rendering the Arabic idiom "رأى ليلاب بعلي" into English as "To play with fire".

- 2- Using an idiom with a similar meaning but dissimilar form where the intended meaning of the TL idiom aligns with that of the source language (SL) but with different lexical items. A good example of this can be translating “بوغرم وعونمم لك” into English as “forbidden fruit is the sweetest”.
- 3- Translation by paraphrase which is used to translate idioms that do not have equivalents in the TL.
- 4- Translation by omission which is used when the meaning in the TL can be reached without translating the ST idiom or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the TT.

In addition to these strategies, literal translation may sometimes be mistakenly employed by translators when dealing with idioms. This involves directly translating the words of an idiom from the SL into the TL without considering the cultural context or the idiomatic meaning (Newmark, 1988). Literal translation often results in awkward or unnatural expressions in the target text, leading to a loss of meaning or confusion for the reader.

2.3 *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

Diary of a Wimpy Kid series has captivated readers worldwide with its humor and relatable storytelling. It was written by Jeff Kinney who was born in 1971 in Fort Washington, Maryland, and has become an acclaimed author, cartoonist, and game designer. In 1998, Kinney started writing down ideas for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, which took him six years before it was published online on funbrain.com in daily installments. In 2006, Kinney signed a multi-book deal with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., bringing *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into print. The first book was released in 2007 and quickly became a bestseller with more than 100,000 copies in print in the United States within a year.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid series was a permanent fixture on the bestseller lists of USA Today, Wall Street Journal, and Publishers Weekly. It even remained on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 775 weeks since the release of the first book. The series won many regional and national awards including two Children's Choice Book Awards and six Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards for Favorite Book. Kinney was also honored as one of Time magazine's most influential people in the world. The series is now available in 84 editions in 69 languages, including Arabic which is published by Arab Scientific Publishers.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid revolves around Greg Heffley, a middle schooler who keeps a journal in which he records his everyday activities. Greg always finds himself in comical and embarrassing situations, although he longs to be popular. Rowley Jefferson, his closest friend, frequently finds himself unintentionally involved in Greg's plans. Greg's relationships with his family, including his excessively protective younger brother Manny and his troublemaking elder brother Rodrick are explored throughout the narrative. Greg manages the difficulties of growing up, coping with bullying, and attempting to fit in at school through a series of escapades, all the while keeping his lighthearted and honest outlook on life.

What makes *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* an excellent choice for research is that it is highly appealing to children, thanks to its humor and engaging illustrations. The books contain a multitude of idiomatic expressions, which are culturally specific and often pose challenges for translators. Understanding how these idioms are rendered for non-English speakers is crucial, taking into account that the target audience consists mainly of children who may not be familiar with idiomatic expressions in the TL. This study sheds light on the strategies translators used to adapt these expressions into Arabic, ensuring they remain comprehensible and entertaining for young readers. By investigating the translation of the series, researchers can gain insights into the balance between maintaining the original meaning and making the text accessible to a different cultural context.

2.4 *Previous Studies*

Translating idiomatic expressions in literary works has attracted the attention of many researchers over the years. Mustonen (2010) investigated the idiom translation strategies from Finnish into English in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. She looked for translation strategies that can be applied in translating idioms in the novel. The study found that the most commonly used strategy is translating SL idiom into non-idiom.

The second most utilized strategy involves translating the SL idiom into the TL idiom, and the last used strategy is the literal translation of the SL idiom.

Likewise, Motallebzadeh and Tousi (2011) examined the challenges associated with preserving idiomatic expressions when translating texts rich in idioms. In his study, 61 idioms and 32 non-idioms of the first chapter of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* were compared with their Persian translations by Daryabandari and Golestan. The findings revealed that, in most cases, the translators rendered the SL idioms into TL non-idioms, resulting in an imbalance between the ST and TT.

Saputro (2012) also investigated the translation strategies used to render English idioms into Indonesian in two novels, *Harry Potter* and *The Deathly Hallows*, based on Baker (2001). The results showed that several translation strategies were utilized, but the most frequently used strategy in idiom translation was translation by paraphrase.

Aliakbar and Masoumeh (2012) examined the translation of idioms and proverbs in *The Adventures of Pinocchio* into Persian. The findings revealed that translation by paraphrase was the most frequently used strategy, followed by replacing the idiom with an equivalent local idiom in the TL.

In the same token, Syifa (2019) analyzed the translation strategies used in translating ideologies and idioms found in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel*. The data were analyzed using Baker's idiom translation strategies and Venuti's concept of translation ideology. The results showed that the most utilized strategy is translating idioms by paraphrasing. It also demonstrates that the translator prioritizes the target culture in idiom translation to contribute to reader comprehension.

Similarly, Al-Jabri (2020) compared the original novel *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, written in English, to its Arabic translation. She focused on the purifying measures imposed by the publishers to adapt inappropriate or unsuitable content such as love, relationships, indecent clothes, religion, and cultural holidays. The study showed that the translators used various translation strategies, including omission, substitution, and cultural adaptation, to purify the original novel's content.

Despite the plethora of studies on the challenges of translating idioms in literary works, there appears to be limited scholarly attention given to the approach followed in rendering idioms in children's literature between English and Arabic. This study aims to fill this gap by examining this area as it has not been extensively explored in translation studies.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the strategies that the translators adopted in rendering idiomatic expressions in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic. The authors selected 4 books of the series to collect idiomatic expressions, namely, *Rodrick Rules*, *Greg Heffley's Journal*, *The Last Straw*, and *Cabin Fever*. This selection is based on the fact that they are top-rated on Naimoli Children's Books Blog¹, an official blog that offers valuable resources for fans of children's literature. It includes reviews of children's books and discussions about different series. Moreover, after examining different books in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, these four proved to contain a high number of idiomatic expressions, which serves the purpose of the study.

The researchers read the English version and spotted the occurrences of idioms, which were then verified using English dictionaries to ensure they were recognized as idiomatic expressions in English. The collected expressions were compared to their equivalents in the Arabic translations, namely, خأل نين اواق, ةري خأل ةشق لال, ي ل في ه غي رغ ت اي موي, ربك أل ل, لزن مل نونج. All English examples were tabulated and aligned with their Arabic equivalents, along with back translation, to verify the accuracy and fidelity of the translation. The Arabic expressions were then examined according to Baker's (1992) strategies for dealing with idioms. Since some expressions were not clearly identified as idiomatic in Arabic, the researchers consulted three Arabic language experts to verify whether Arabic equivalents were idioms or not. The data were classified according to the strategy used, and a quantitative analysis was conducted to identify the

strategies most frequently used by the translators. For strategies with more than five examples, only five were selected as a sample for the qualitative analysis due to space constraints.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section consists of two parts: the quantitative and qualitative analyses that were utilized to find the strategies used in rendering idiomatic expressions in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The researchers collected all idioms in the four books under investigation, namely, *Rodrick Rules*, *Greg Heffley’s Journal*, *The Last Straw*, and *Cabin Fever*. Table (1) indicates the number of idioms found in each book. It must be noted that duplicated idioms were counted only once.

Table 1. Number of idioms collected from the four books

Book	Number of Idioms
Rodrick Rules	31
Greg Heffley’s Journal	36
The Last Straw	39
Cabin Fever	25
Total	131

After reviewing the translation strategies used in rendering these idioms into Arabic, five strategies were identified, as demonstrated in Table (2).

Table 2. Number and percentage of idioms according to the translation strategy used

No.	Translation Strategy	Number of idioms	Percentage (%)
1	Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form	13	9.92%
2	Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Form	6	4.58%
3	Paraphrasing	106	80.91%
4	Omission	1	0.76%
5	Literal Translation	5	3.81%

The translation strategy of paraphrasing was the most utilized in rendering idiomatic expressions into Arabic, with 80.91%. The strategy that ranked second was using an idiom of similar meaning and form with 9.92%. 4.58% of the idioms were rendered using an idiom with a similar meaning but a different form. 3.81% of the idioms were translated literally and omission was observed in 0.76% of the overall expressions.

The high percentage of the paraphrasing strategy can be attributed to the fact that the primary audience of these books is children whose cognitive abilities are still developing. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to use clear language that is easily understood by children, especially since they are more likely unfamiliar with the idiomatic meaning of these expressions and are unaware of the contextual backgrounds associated with their meanings. Additionally, children may take the meaning of the idioms literally which leads to confusion and affects the flow of the narrative. All this necessitates idioms be paraphrased using simple language that maintains the intended meaning and remains accessible to young readers. This is in line with Aliakbar and Masoumeh (2012), (Motallebzadeh & Tousi, 2011), Saputro (2012), and Syifa (2019) who all found that paraphrasing was the most frequently used strategy in rendering idioms in literary works.

As for the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form, it was limitedly employed in cases where the same cultural significance is expressed in a TL idiom that children can easily comprehend. Using the same literary style as the ST may help maintain the tone and humor of the narrative and contribute to the character’s development. However, the low percentage of this strategy is due to the difficulty, or even

impossibility, of finding an idiom that matches the meaning and form of the ST expression. Even if an equivalent idiom does exist, translators must take into consideration the comprehension level of the target readers and avoid complex structures that may obstruct the flow of the meaning.

Likewise, using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form was also scarcely employed by the translators. This involves the delivery of the general meaning of the idiom but using different imagery that is more common in the TL. However, this may be a major disadvantage in children’s literature, where the story has to flow naturally and be captivating. More importantly, when using an idiom with a different form, it may not be as successful to suit the tone, formality, or style requirements of the context in which it is employed. As a result, translators tend to choose simpler strategies like paraphrasing or employing a direct translation.

In line with (Mustonen, 2010), literal translation was sparingly employed, accounting for only 3.81% of the overall data. This approach usually results in confusion or misinterpretation when translating idioms, disrupting the reading experience. This is due to the fact that these expressions draw on specific cultural references that are unfamiliar to the target reader. However, in very few cases, literal translation may still make sense in the TL, especially when the idiom is straightforward and does not involve a deep metaphorical meaning. This may be preferred sometimes to maintain the original tone of the ST and the humorous effect entailed in the expression.

Finally, omission was utilized only once in translating the idiomatic expressions into Arabic as this strategy may lead to a loss in meaning and reduce the richness of elements that may contribute to the author’s style and voice. More importantly, the availability of other strategies that can effectively convey the meaning without the need to delete the idiom, such as paraphrasing, makes omission a last resort for translators. Using this strategy once, however, was only when the expression contained inappropriate content and did not contribute significantly to the storyline, a finding that was confirmed earlier by (Al-Jabri, 2020).

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

This section examines and analyzes specific examples of the translation strategies used to render idioms in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* into Arabic.

4.2.1 Paraphrasing

In carefully examining the idiomatic expressions collected from the four books of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, the most commonly adopted strategy was paraphrasing. Table (3) includes examples of how this strategy was utilized in the Arabic translation.

No.	ST	TT	Back Translation
1	The only condition was that she had to ride in the back because I had already called shotgun	وكان شرطنا الوحيد أن تركب في الخلف لأنني جلست شخصيا قرب السائق	Our only condition was that she ride in the back because I personally sat next to the driver .
2	Rowley asked what he would do if he needed to go Number Two, but I told him we’d cross that bridge when we came to it	عندها سألتني راولي عما يجدر به فعله إذا احتاج إلى قضاء حاجته رقم اثنين، فقلت له أننا سنتخطى هذه المشكلة عندما نصل إليها	Then Rowley asked me what he should do if he needed to relieve himself number two, and I told him we’d get over that problem when we got to it
3	Even the teachers are kissing Rowley’s butt	حتى الأساتذة كانوا يتملقون راولي	Even the professors were flattering Rowley
4	After I got done mopping the floor with Rowley, I headed home	بعدها اكتفيت من هزم روالي اليوم، عدت إلى المنزل	After I had enough of defeating Rowley today, I went home
5	I was kind of down in the dumps on the walk home from school today	كنت محبطا نوعا ما في طريق عودتي اليوم من المدرسة إلى المنزل	I was kind of depressed on my way home from school today

In example (1), Greg and Rodrick offered to help an old lady by giving her a ride to the supermarket under the condition that she sit in the back seat because Greg had already called “shotgun”. This informal expression is very common among children and is used to claim the front passenger seat in the car. There

is no equivalent to this phrase in Arabic, especially in the standard form in which the series was rendered. The translator paraphrased the expression as “قئاسلا برق اي صخش تسلاج” to convey the meaning of sitting next to the driver, which is not what the English idiom denotes. “Calling shotgun” involves a verbal claim to the seat, and not necessarily the act of sitting down. A more accurate translation could be “تجح” (I already booked the front seat).

In example (2), Greg and Rowley were making a Pac-Man game from cardboard for the Holiday Bazaar. Rowley was going to operate ghosts from inside the box and was worried about what he would do if he needed to use the bathroom. Greg responded with the idiom, “we’d cross that bridge when we came to it”, implying that they needed not to worry about a possible future problem but would deal with it if it actually happened. The translator opted for paraphrasing using the Arabic phrase “هذه ي طختن س” “ة لك شمل”. Although the translation lacks the metaphorical sense implied by the original expression, it captures the essence of dealing with a problem when it arises using comprehensible words for children. However, a slight difference in meaning is observed as the Arabic expression assumes that the problem is inevitable, unlike the English idiom, which indicates a hypothetical future situation. A more appropriate phrase would be “هان ه جاو اذا رم الال عم لماعتن س” (we’ll deal with it if we encounter it) as it preserves the uncertainty reflected in the English idiom.

Example (3) refers to the situation when Greg quit his job as a school cartoonist and learned that Rowley replaced him. Greg was annoyed that Rowley was gaining fame even by the teachers whom he accused of “kissing Rowley’s butt”. This idiom is informal and impolite, implying attempts to be very nice to someone to get an advantage. The Arabic equivalent intended to convey the same meaning is “نوقل م تي” which is culturally acceptable and avoids the taboo associated with the original phrase. The translator reflected the conservative cultural norms of the Arab World, where such expressions are forbidden, particularly in materials targeting children. However, the translation lost the humorous tone embedded in the English idiom.

In example (4), Greg and Rowley were playing a car racing video game, and Greg used the idiom “mopping the floor with” to describe how he kept beating Rowley, who was not a serious gamer. The phrase is an informal expression that means defeating someone thoroughly. The translator opted for a simple equivalent “مزه” which is easily understood by children. Nevertheless, it does not reflect the imagery depicted in the original phrase, nor does it capture Greg’s bragging over his repeated wins.

In example (5), Greg was expressing his feelings after the embarrassing incident when a pair of dirty underwear fell out of one of his trouser legs in front of some girls. He used the idiom “down in the dumps” which denotes being very sad. As was the case in the previous idioms, the translator paraphrased the expression in Arabic as “اطبحم”, which is considered an age-appropriate choice for children. Still, it does not evoke the same depth of emotion implied by the original idiom.

4.2.2 Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form

The second strategy for rendering idioms into Arabic was to use an idiom of similar meaning and form. Table (4) includes examples of how this strategy was employed in the Arabic translation.

Table 4. Examples of using an idiom of similar meaning and form in the Arabic translation

No.	ST	TT	Back Translation
6	When I heard the sound of chewing, I turned on my flashlight and caught the thief red-handed	وعندما سمعت صوت المضغ، أترت مصباحي و أمسكت بالسارق بالجرم المشهود	When I heard the chewing sound, I turned on my flashlight and caught the thief red-handed
7	Manny’s been turning the house upside down looking for his blanket	قلب ماني المنزل رأسا على عقب بحثا عن بطانيته	Manny’s been turning the house upside down looking for his blanket
8	Last year Mom caught me lying, and I paid the price for it	في العام الفائت، ضبطتني أمي و أنا أكذب، و دفعت ثمن ذلك	Last year, my mom caught me lying, and I paid the price for it.
9	I try to explain all this popularity stuff to my friend Rowley, but I think it goes in one ear and out the other with him	أحاول أن أشرح أمور الشعبية هذه كلها لصديقي راولي، ولكن أعتقد أن ما أقوله له يدخل من أذن ويخرج من الأخرى	I try to explain all this popularity stuff to my friend Rowley, but I guess what I’m telling him goes in one ear and out the other
10	Even though Rowley has been a total jerk lately, I tried to break the ice with him today	بالرغم من أن راولي يتصرف بغباء مؤخرًا، إلا أنني حاولت كسر الجليد معه اليوم	Even though Rowley has been acting stupid lately, I tried to break the ice with him today

In example (6), Greg wanted to catch the person who had been stealing the lunch snacks and decided to hide in the laundry basket. When he heard the sound of chewing, he turned on the flashlight “to catch his dad red-handed”. The translator rendered this phrase into “دوه شمل مرجلاب قراسلاب تكسمأ” which is a widely recognized expression in Arabic with a similar meaning and form and is used in the same situations as the original idiom. Despite the accuracy of the translation, it is perceived as being formal and is typically associated with legal jargon. This makes it debatable when considering its suitability for children and for the casual tone of the situation.

Example (7) refers to Manny trying to find the blanket his dad threw away. He turned the house “upside down,” an expression that describes a thorough and frantic search. In the Arabic version, the idiom used to convey this meaning is “بقع يلع اسأر” which captures the metaphorical essence and preserves the same style of the original expression. Additionally, it is very common across different age groups that children would easily understand its meaning.

In example (8), Greg recalls when his mom did not allow anyone to eat from the gingerbread house she prepared for the Christmas Eve dinner. He ate all the gumdrop candies and lied when she confronted him. She wrote a parenting column for the local newspaper about what Greg did and he “paid the price” for lying. This idiom denotes experiencing the bad result of something you have done. Arabic has a similar expression, “نم ثتع فد”, which was employed in the same context of the translated version. The translation effectively conveys the intended meaning and retains the tone of the ST idiom.

Example (9) portrays Greg talking about how he always tried to teach Rowley about the concept of popularity, but he never cared. The expression “it goes in one ear and out the other” means that someone hears what you say but doesn’t pay attention or retain the information. The translator used the exact equivalent in Arabic, namely, “ىرخأل نم جرخيو نذأ نم لخددي”, which aligns with both the form and meaning of the original phrase. This expression is familiar and easily understandable by children as it is used in the colloquial Arabic variety.

Similarly, in example (10), Greg and Rowley were having some tension in their friendship, leading Greg to describe Rowley as acting like a total jerk. Greg decides to mend things by trying to “break the ice” with Rowley. This expression is used to reduce awkwardness between people after a period of disagreement. The same expression is utilized in Arabic, “دي لجل رسك”, which captures the intended meaning of the original phrase but is deemed slightly more formal.

4.2.3 Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Form

Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form was also utilized in translating the English expressions into Arabic as demonstrated in Table (5).

Table 5. Examples of using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form in the Arabic translation

No.	ST	TT	Back Translation
11	When he woke up and found out we were decorating the tree without him, he had a total meltdown	وعندما استيقظ ووجد أننا نزين الشجرة من دونه، انفجر في نوبة غضب كبيرة	When he woke up and found out we were decorating the tree without him, he burst out in anger
12	But dad uncovered the big area in no time flat	لكن أبي كشف عن المساحة الكبيرة التي زال طلاؤها بلمح البصر	But my father revealed the large area whose paint had been removed at a glance
13	I would have traded for Benny Wells in a heartbeat	ولكنني بادلته ببني ويلز بغمضة عين	I would have traded for Benny Wells in the blink of an eye
14	But dad didn't put two and two together	لكن أبي لم يجمع الخيوط معا	But dad didn't put the threads together
15	I was not ready to set the record straight just yet	غير أنني لم أكن مستعدا بعد لوضع الامور في نصابها	I was not ready yet to put things in order

In example (11), Manny was upset when he discovered that the family started decorating the Christmas tree without him. The idiom used to convey his emotional outburst is “he had a total meltdown” which was translated into Arabic as “ةري بك بضرغ ةبون يف رجفنا”. This phrase makes use of the metaphorical sense of “explosion” to express anger or frustration which encompasses the intensity of the reaction reflected in the English phrase. Although the Arabic idiom does not correspond in form to the English idiom, it fits well as a cultural equivalent to the original phrase and effectively captures the meaning of emotional collapse.

Example (12) refers to a situation where Manny placed a sticker on his dad’s car, and Greg tried to remove it. However, since the sticker did not come off easily, Greg used a steel-wool pad, which accidentally removed the car’s paint along with the sticker. To cover up his mistake, Greg attached a note from his mom over the damaged area which his dad realized very quickly. This was indicated using the idiom “in no time flat” which commonly describes activities that are completed remarkably fast. In Arabic, the same meaning was expressed using a different form, “رصب لال حم لب”, which is a common metaphor that connotes rapidity. Therefore, the translation effectively conveys the meaning implied in the original phrase. A similar Arabic phrase was used in example (13) when Greg was in his wrestling class, where the students were divided into pairs for practice matches. Although Greg felt relieved that he did not have to wrestle Benny Wells, the strongest in the class, he ended up pairing up with Fregley, whom he found very annoying and unpredictable. Therefore, Greg realized that he’d still rather face someone strong than someone like Fregley. This feeling was reflected in his exaggerated statement that he would have traded for Benny Wells “in a heartbeat”, which emphasizes his intense dislike for his actual partner, Fregley. This idiom means that something is done without delay or hesitation, which was rendered into Arabic as “ن يف ة ضمغب”, presenting the same meaning but different wording. This choice is culturally appropriate and delivers the intended meaning using a familiar Arabic expression.

Similarly, in example (14), Rodrick switched the bathroom door after throwing a party while his parents were away, assuming that his father wouldn’t see the damage to the previous door. Although the father noticed the swapped door, he “didn’t put two and two together”. This expression implies that the father failed to link what happened to the door to Rodrick’s party. In Arabic, the commonly used phrase to refer to such a situation is “اعم طوي خال عم جي مل”. Although both expressions capture the meaning of failing to connect the dots between events, the Arabic equivalent slightly diverges in form and tone from the original. More importantly, it could be argued that a direct translation that avoids the metaphorical implication would be more appropriate, given that the target readers are mainly children. Hence, using a phrase such as “ثادحل ا ط بري مل” (did not connect events) could be better to suit their cognitive abilities.

Example (15) involves a situation where Greg was mistaken for Rowley. Greg was chasing kids with worms wearing Rowley’s hat, which led his mother’s friend to think it was Rowley who was causing trouble. Greg chose not to “set the record straight” and clarify the misunderstanding to escape responsibility. This idiom means providing facts to prove people have a false understanding of something. To translate this expression, the translator opted for an Arabic phrase that is said in similar situations, namely, “رومأل عوضو”, “اهب اصن يف”. Although the Arabic translation maintains the essence of the original expression, it differs in tone as it sounds more formal. Additionally, it may not resonate with the simple language typically used in children’s reading materials. “أطخلل حي حصت” (correcting the mistake) may be an easier alternative for young readers to understand.

4.2.4 Literal Translation

In very few cases, translators resorted to rendering the idioms literally into Arabic, as Table (7) shows.

Table 7. Examples of rendering idioms literally in the Arabic translation

No.	ST	TT	Back Translation
16	But one day I came home from school, and I couldn't find Alfredo ANYWHERE. I searched the house from top to bottom , but there was no trace of him	لكن، حين عدت ذات اليوم من المدرسة، لم أستطع العثور على ألفرنديو في أي مكان. فتشيت المنزل من الأعلى إلى الأسفل، ولكنني لم أجد أثرًا له	But one day I came home from school, and I couldn't find Alfredo anywhere. I searched the house from top to bottom , but there was no trace of him
17	But Mom and Dad have always been SUPER protective of Manny, and they won't let me lay a finger on him, even if he totally deserves it	لكن أمي وأبي يحرصان كثيرا على حماية ماني، ولا يسمحان لي بوضع إصبعي عليه، حتى لو كان يستحق ذلك تماما	But Mom and Dad have always been SUPER protective of Manny, and they won't let me put a finger on him, even if he totally deserves it
18	When we tried to think up some jokes, we kind of hit a wall	فعدنا حاولنا التفكير في بعض النكات، اصطدمنا نوعا ما بالحائط	When we tried to think up some jokes, we kind of hit a wall
19	Sleeping after school is the only way I can really recharge my batteries	فالنوم بعد المدرسة هو الطريقة الوحيدة التي أستطيع من خلالها أن أعيد شحن بطارياتي	Sleeping after school is the only way I can really recharge my batteries
20	This Class Favorite thing has really got my gears turning	صفحة المفضلين في الصف جعلت محركاتي تعمل	This Class Favorite page has really got my engines running

In example (16), Greg discovered that Alfredo, the doll he had created to replace his younger brother Manny's blanket which had been thrown away, was missing. To avoid Manny's wrath for losing the doll, Greg looked for the doll everywhere which was indicated by using the idiom "from top to bottom". This idiom is used in English to mean that something is done in a very thorough way. The translator rendered this idiom literally "ل فسألنا كل مكان" although it is not commonly used in Arabic. This expression sounds awkward and unnatural to Arabic speakers and does not fully capture the idiomatic meaning. A more appropriate equivalent would be "ديوانك يفتش" (I searched every corner) which conveys the meaning of thoroughness more naturally.

Likewise, in example (17), Greg was expressing his annoyance about the way his younger brother, Manny, is treated by his parents who seemed excessively protective of him. This protective attitude frustrates Greg who said that his parents would not let him "lay a finger on him". This idiom is usually used in negative statements to mean "touch or hit someone". Again, the translator opted for literal translation in Arabic, rendering the idiom into "ه يلع يعبص إعضوب" which does not seem an appropriate equivalent. A more culturally suitable translation may involve a phrase that fits more naturally within the context of interacting with a younger sibling such as "ه يلع يدي دم أن" (to touch him).

Example (18) occurs when Greg and Rowley were trying to come up with fresh ideas for a project they were working on for school, but they were having trouble doing that. The phrase "hit a wall" is used to describe a situation where someone faces an obstacle, which means in this context that Greg and Rowley couldn't think of any more jokes or ideas, leading to frustration and causing them to stop working on their project. The Arabic equivalent to this phrase was "طئاحلاب ام اعون انم دطصا" which may not be culturally appropriate for the target readers. An alternative translation that is more common in Arabic and can deliver the same sense is "ديربك دل كشم انه جاو" (we faced a big problem). This phrase maintains the metaphorical meaning and is deemed more accessible and culturally appropriate for the readers.

Additionally, example (19) refers to the situation when Greg was expressing how taking a nap after school is the only way to "recharge his batteries". This expression means restoring energy and strength after feeling exhausted. The translator opted for literal translation in Arabic rendering the expression as "ديعأ" "يتايراطب نحش". Although this is not a widely used expression among Arabic speakers, it effectively

conveys the meaning and retains the metaphorical sense of the ST idiom. A more natural expression that remains relatable and appropriate in Arabic is “يطاشن ةداعتسال” (restore my energy).

Finally, in example (20), Greg was talking about the “Class Favorites” election for the Yearbook at his school, which got his “gears turning”. This refers to a situation when someone is deep in thought about something. In the Arabic version, the idiom was literally translated into “لمعت ي تاكرحم تلعج” which is not widely recognized by the target readers. While this equivalent preserved the metaphor presented in the original expression, it does not seem easy for young readers to grasp. An alternative translation that could be more familiar and natural to Arabic speakers is “يسأر يف روتد راكفألا تآدب” (Ideas started spinning in my head).

4.2.5 Omission

Translators may sometimes find omission the best way to overcome the difficulty of translating some idiomatic expressions. In the Arabic translation of the four books under investigation, this strategy was only used once as indicated in Table (8).

No.	ST	TT	Back Translation
21	Besides trying to find a way to get dad off my back , I have a couple of other reasons for wanting to join the Boy Scouts.	The sentence was fully deleted	The sentence was fully deleted

In example (21), Greg Heffley was considering joining the Boy Scouts for different reasons one of which is to alleviate the pressure his dad had been putting on him. The idiom used to denote this meaning was “get dad off my back” which the translators chose to omit in the Arabic rendition. This may be due to the fact that in Arab culture, which is strongly guided by Islamic teachings, it is forbidden to be rude or disrespectful to parents. Children are taught to respect and honor their parents at a very young age, making it a highly valued principle. Therefore, since this sentence contains implications of a dismissive attitude toward the father, the translators decided to delete it all, especially since it does not significantly contribute to the development of the story events.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shed light on translating idiomatic expressions in children’s literature, mainly, in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. It explored the strategies that the translators employed to address the challenges encountered in maintaining the essence of Jeff Kinney’s original idioms while ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance for the Arab young readers.

The analysis showed a clear preference for paraphrasing when translating idioms from English into Arabic. This approach was dominant, emphasizing the translators’ focus on delivering meaning even when the SL idiom was altered. Paraphrasing is often favored when the target audience is children as it simplifies the text while preserving its content. This is deemed necessary in children’s literature since they may not have the cognitive and cultural framework to comprehend complex or unfamiliar idioms in their literal form. By utilizing this strategy, translators intend to ensure that the TT is coherent and relevant, preserving the story’s accessibility and appeal to children.

The strategy of using an idiom with a similar meaning and form was the second most frequent, demonstrating an effort to maintain both the idiomatic expression and its cultural relevance. The use of idioms with similar meanings but different forms was less common, as it is not easy to find culturally equivalent expressions in the TL.

It is worth mentioning that English idioms are mostly used informally which adds to the challenge of rendering them into Arabic, especially since Arabic typically leans toward a more formal style in written texts. English idioms used in children’s books are often playful and contribute to the character’s development,

style, and humor. However, when these idioms are translated into Arabic, they may take on a more formal tone, justifying the low percentage of using equivalent expressions in the Arabic version.

This study may be helpful for translators working on children's literature who can gain insights into the challenges and strategies related to translating idiomatic expressions. It can also help educators and curriculum developers promote multilingualism and cross-cultural appreciation among young readers. They can design educational programs that introduce students to translated literature from diverse regions, offering a platform for children to engage with other languages and cultural narratives. This cultivates an early enthusiasm for intercultural communication and deepens children's understanding of global perspectives.

This study is limited to examining four books of the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, concentrating exclusively on one linguistic aspect—the translation of idioms from English into Arabic. Future research may broaden its focus by investigating other language features, such as puns or humor, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of translation strategies used in children's literature. Researchers may also explore other texts within the same genre or across different genres to analyze translation approaches across contexts. Moreover, analyzing the translation of idioms in different language pairs may reveal if the strategies employed in Arabic are also common in other languages. The findings of this study may not be directly applicable to other genres since children's literature often prioritizes accessibility, simplicity, and cultural adaptation to facilitate young readers' engagement with the text.

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