



**IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE MERCIFUL,
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Constructing Saudi Cultural Identity Through Paratexts: A Case Study of the Translated Children's Book *Sidra's Adventure in AIUla*

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Abstract

Children's literature is crucial to the development of cultural identity and national awareness, especially when such works undergo cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation. This paper focuses on how paratextual items contribute to the formation and development of Saudi cultural identity in translated children's literature, using *Sidra's Adventure in AIUla* as a case study. Based on Genette's theory of paratexts, this discussion concentrates on the peritextual elements—including the title, cover art, illustrations, and publisher's notes—to demonstrate how these elements can be symbolically used to convey the cultural heritage of AIUla, and Saudi Arabia in general. The study employs a qualitative and product-focused approach to researching how these characteristics inform an interpretive framework for young readers and perpetuate cultural narratives. The results indicate that the visual and textual framing of the book's peritext actively fosters Saudi identity, as well as intercultural understanding. This study reveals that the peritextual elements in the translation of children's books are more than mere decoration; rather, they serve as crucial semiotic tools that support ideological, pedagogical, and cultural purposes. The study contributes to the fields of translation studies and children's literature by focusing on the role of peritext in determining cultural meaning and reader reception. The practical implications of this research are particularly relevant to translators, publishers, and those involved in the field of curriculum development, where cultural sensitivity is crucial. Moreover, the study opens the door to future research on the role of visual and textual framing in translated works in relation to reinforcing cross-cultural discourse and assisting readers in their identity construction.

Keywords: paratext-oriented translation approaches, translated children's literature, Saudi cultural identity, text mediation and reception, visual semiotics.

Introduction

Children's translated literature is used not only to entertain young people, but also to pass on cultural values, national stories, and memories. It is also an effective tool for socialization, identity building, and intercultural communication through storytelling, especially when texts transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Over the past few years, researchers in the fields of translation studies and children's literature have increasingly recognized the importance of paratextual elements (titles, cover design, illustrations, publisher comments, etc.) in mediating the reception of translated work, as well as the conveyance of cultural meaning to the reader (Genette, 1997; O'Sullivan, 2018; Tahir-Gürçaglar, 2002). Van Coillie and McMartin (2020) further stressed that the translation of children's literature should be regarded in the context of its broader textual and contextual environments, in which paratextual considerations play a key role in directing the attention of young readers toward cultural discourses.

Although there is increasing academic interest in the paratextual analysis of translation studies, little attention has been accorded to how these elements operate in the Arabic-English translation of children's literature—especially in those aimed at instilling Saudi culture among children. Most current studies remain focused on the level of translation strategies, linguistic transfer, or ideological positioning in the main body text. In contrast, the paratext, which surrounds and shapes the reading experience, has not received the same level of critical attention. Such a gap is particularly remarkable, considering the increasing output of culturally rich children's books in the Arab world and their strategic deployment in promoting national heritage and identity on the international stage. However, little research has been conducted to explore the role of paratextual features in the Arabic-English translation of children's literature that aims to convey Saudi cultural identity. The present paper fills that gap by exploring how these aspects contribute to the development of cultural meaning and facilitate cross-cultural comprehension, thereby advancing study in both paratextual studies and the realm of Arabic translation research. This is achieved in this study through a meticulous examination of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* (AlAqeel, 2023), a book written in Arabic by Joud AlAqeel, illustrated by Tala Hadhrawi, subsequently translated into English, and published by Tashkeel Publishing Company. The book is a good example of how literary texts designed for children can be packaged to become vehicles for cultural identity, national narratives, and heritage. The story is both a fictional narrative and a meticulously constructed cultural artifact that serves to familiarize local and global readers alike with the rich heritage of *AlUla*, a historical Saudi Arabian city.

Relying on the seminal theory of paratexts formulated by Genette (1997), this study focuses on peritextual features, including the cover design, title, illustrations, and publisher's foreword, which serve as interpretive thresholds, conditioning the expectations of the reader and framing the layers of cultural meaning. Genette defined paratexts as “those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader: titles, and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues and afterwords” (1997, p. xviii). These literary devices, which support and complement the main text, play a vital part in determining the reading experience and influencing how a text is viewed by its recipient culture. They are the thresholds of interpretation, steering the reader toward the specific meanings and cultural references embedded within the narrative. Genette maintained that paratextual elements reside in an “undefined zone,” occupying an ambiguous position poised between the text and external commentary. This liminality renders them difficult to categorize and adds to the layered nature of literary communication. This very ambiguity is also particularly significant in terms of translated literature, since it is these paratextual elements that offer the interpretive tools that help to narrow the cultural gaps existing between the source and target cultures.

Academics working in the field of translation studies have long acknowledged the significance of paratextual elements. Many scholars, including Schulte and Biguenet (1992), Delisle and Woodsworth (1995), and Robinson (1997), have highlighted the significant role played by translation prefaces, introductions, and various paratextual materials in restructuring and understanding the history of translation. Moreover, Tahir-Gürçaglar (2002) emphasized the relevance of textual, extratextual, and paratextual elements in translation research, asserting that they provide helpful insights into how a culture understands and frames translation. In addition, she noted that paratextual elements can be viewed as clues, indicating how a culture defines translation and offering valuable insights into the way in which a translated text is produced and received (Tahir-Gürçaglar, 2002, p. 45).

In particular, the role of peritextual elements in representing and promoting Saudi cultural heritage through *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* is analyzed here. This study aims to demonstrate

the collaboration between visual and textual elements, including the book title, cover, illustrations, and publisher's foreword, in developing culturally relevant narratives for young readers. The results show that the peritextual elements are not decorative, but are semiotic devices intended to establish interpretive paradigms, support cultural identity, and promote cross-cultural awareness. Thus, the study contributes to the emerging body of research on paratextual analysis in translation studies and demonstrates the critical significance of peritexts as mediators of cultural meaning in Arabic-English children's literature, addressing two main research questions, namely:

1. How do the peritextual features of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* represent and promote the cultural heritage of AlUla city and the broader Saudi Arabian identity?
2. How do the peritextual features of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* support and reconcile cultural identity for young readers both locally and globally?

The Theoretical Framework: Genette's Paratext

Defining Paratext and Its Relevance to Children's Literature

Genette (1987, 1997) introduced the term "paratext" to describe the textual and visual features that are included with the main text to influence how readers respond to it. This framework specifically applies to the study of children's literature, in which peritextual features (covers, titles, illustrations, etc.) occupy a central position, directing the process of engagement for young readers and influencing their cultural perception. The paratext theory, which was launched in his ground-breaking French work *Seuils* (Genette, 1987), and subsequently translated into English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (Genette, 1997), emphasizes the significant degree to which these complementary materials influence the reading experience and determine how texts are received in their recipient cultures. According to Genette (1997, p. 1), paratext is defined as "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public." Accordingly, paratextual elements comprise titles, prefaces, dedications, illustrations, book covers, interviews, advertisements, and reviews.

Further, Genette (1997) argued that the paratext is deemed to be the "threshold" that "offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (p. 2). Thus, paratextual elements play a leading role in determining whether the potential reader is attracted to reading the text or rejects the reading experience. As a result, the way in which a book is received is influenced by a range of paratextual elements, which are viewed as "the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public" (Genette, 1991, p. 261). Genette (1991) went on to assert that every text should integrate embedded paratextual materials that will influence how it is received within a particular context (p. 263).

Genette's Typology of Paratextual Categories

Genette (1997) set out to categorize paratextual elements spatially (i.e., their position within the text), temporally (i.e., the time in which they appear and disappear), substantially (i.e., their mode of existence), pragmatically (i.e., in relation to addressers and addressees), and functionally (i.e. their function within a particular context). Concerning the spatial paratext, Genette (1997) introduced two main categories—peritext and epitext. Peritext refers to internal elements such as book covers, titles, prefaces, preliminary pages, and introductions, which are either directly attached to, or situated within, the main text. In contrast, epitext covers the elements that are external to the main text, including interviews, reviews, and discussions (Genette, 1997, p. 5). These elements are located in an ambiguous space, both inside and outside the text, termed by Genette (1997, p. 2) as an "undefined zone," which influences the

way that texts are packaged, promoted, and received within a particular context. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of paratexts is vital in mediating between the text and its readership, while concurrently playing a part in the meaning-making process.

Building on Genette's framework, Batchelor (2018) provided additional insights into the role of paratexts, pointing out that "the translated text is considered to be the original text; considering its paratext is no different from considering the paratext of a new edition of an original work" (p. 21). Paratextual materials are valuable tools for mediating texts that are historically and culturally remote from the target readership, thereby bridging the gap between the texts and their potential readers. Batchelor stated that paratextual elements can be materially expressed, either as peritext or epitext, serving to present the text and affect its reception, or comment on it. Hence, by definition, peritextual elements are always paratextual, and they play a key role in shaping how the audience interprets and receives the text, as stated by Paloposki (2021, p. 7).

The cover of a book is one of the most noticeable elements of a published work and, according to Genette (1997, p. 24), is made up of four parts: the front cover, the inside front cover (cover 2), the inside back cover (cover 3), and the back cover. Each of these parts frequently features peritextual elements, including the title of the book, the name of the author, the name of the illustrator, the publisher's logo, the date the book was published, and, perhaps, blurbs or biographical information. In addition, the colors, design motifs, typography, and cultural symbols are semiotic resources communicating meaning that transcends the textual content.

Moreover, prefaces, dedications, and acknowledgments are seen as vital components of the authorial peritext, used to acquaint readers with the text and influence their interpretation. Genette (1997) defined the preface as "every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it" (p. 161). In the context of translated works, the nature of these prefaces can differ according to whether they were written by the author, translator, editor, or publisher, indicating various degrees of intended objectives and authority.

Paratext as a Mediator of the Text

A number of scholars (Gürçağlar, 2002; Kung, 2013; Lee, 2020; Luo & Zhang, 2018; Pellatt, 2013; Toledano-Buendía, 2013) have recently used paratextual analysis as a method for investigating how translated texts are mediated for target audiences. According to Gürçağlar (2011), this methodological approach can unearth valuable information about principal aspects, including the translator's objectives, the projected readership, the role of translators and publishers, and the norms that shape translation practices in particular cultural settings (pp. 113–114). Nevertheless, she also emphasized that paratextual analysis should be viewed as complementary to textual analysis, not as a substitute for it, even though it is key to understanding the mediation of translated texts (Gürçağlar, 2011, p. 115).

This study examines the peritextual elements of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*, thus investigating how the book's cultural identity is mediated and framed through these elements. A number of features—including the cover design, title, illustrations, typography, and foreword—are analyzed to determine how these multifaced elements act as interpretive instruments, thus constructing the narrative for the young target readership. The peritextual materials embedded within *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* do not simply complement the main text, but also play an active role in constructing and communicating meanings that are closely tied to the traditional legacy of Saudi Arabia—specifically, the cultural and historical importance of AlUla. In so doing, they influence how the book will be received locally as well

as globally, and reflect the wider cultural and ideological aims behind its translation and publication. This analysis provides a valuable contribution to understanding how translated children's literature can become a means of promoting cultural representation, forming identity, and encouraging international cultural exchange.

Methodology

Taking into account the aforementioned theoretical insights, this study applies Genette's paratextual typology to evaluate how the peritext associated with *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* functions as a cultural and interpretive framework, using a qualitative, product-oriented approach to analyze its peritextual elements. This approach is appropriate for addressing the study's research questions, since it examines how peritextual elements reflect Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage (RQ1) and mediate cultural identity, at both local and global levels, for young readers (RQ2). The analysis offers insights into the role that translated books play in cultural representation and literary positioning by focusing on the threshold, framing, and ideological functions of peritext. *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* was selected for this study since it is both culturally relevant and a rich source of material for peritextual analysis. The story is deeply rooted in the context of Saudi culture and history, and highlights the heritage legacy of AlUla, one of the country's most important archaeological and cultural landmarks (Royal Commission for AlUla, 2024).

One of the goals of Vision 2030 is to promote heritage tourism and national identity; hence, AlUla has a prominent role in Saudi cultural and national discourse. The book's focus on this heritage, and its intentional use of prominent Saudi cultural symbols—for example, Nabataean motifs, desert landscapes, traditional clothing, and cultural artefacts—makes it a perfect case study for investigating how children's translated literature mediates cultural identity. Further, *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* is a children's book, and this genre relies on peritextual materials to attract younger readers, guide interpretation, and frame the meaning of the narrative. Children's literature frequently places a great deal of emphasis on visual and textual peritextual elements—cover design, illustrations, typography, and publisher's notes—to convey meaning and transmit cultural values to its young readers. This makes it particularly apposite for a study informed by Genette's (1997) theory of paratexts, which defines paratext as a “threshold of interpretation” that mediates the relationship between the text and the audience.

Data collection was undertaken by carrying out a detailed, systematic review of the physical peritextual materials embedded in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*. This process involved a meticulous examination of the book's cover, title, illustrations, layout, typography, and publisher's logos, since these are fundamental elements of the peritextual presentation of the book. Close attention was also paid to the visual and textual clues found in the front and back covers, along with prefatory materials that precede the main narrative. The analysis assigns priority to the spatial and functional dimensions of the peritext, to determine how particular visual and textual elements affect the book's reception and the communication of cultural meanings.

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis in line with Genette's (1997) typology of peritextual functions. Implementing the product-oriented approach employed in this case was facilitated through a systematic analysis of the most prominent peritextual features, including titles, illustrations, and publisher's logos. Discussion regarding each element was conducted with regard to the threshold, framing, cultural, and ideological functions by the study's research questions. This systematic tool ensured that proper attention was paid to the role of peritextual materials in relation to the cultural and communicative aspects of the translated text. The analysis comprised three major functional categories:

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- Threshold function: Exploring how the peritext invites the target readers of this translated story into the narrative and frames their opening engagement.
- Framing function: Examining how readers' expectations of the story's themes, setting, and cultural references are shaped by the visual and textual elements.
- Cultural and ideological function: Evaluating how the peritextual materials transmit particular aspects of Saudi heritage, history, and identity—in particular, in relation to AlUla.

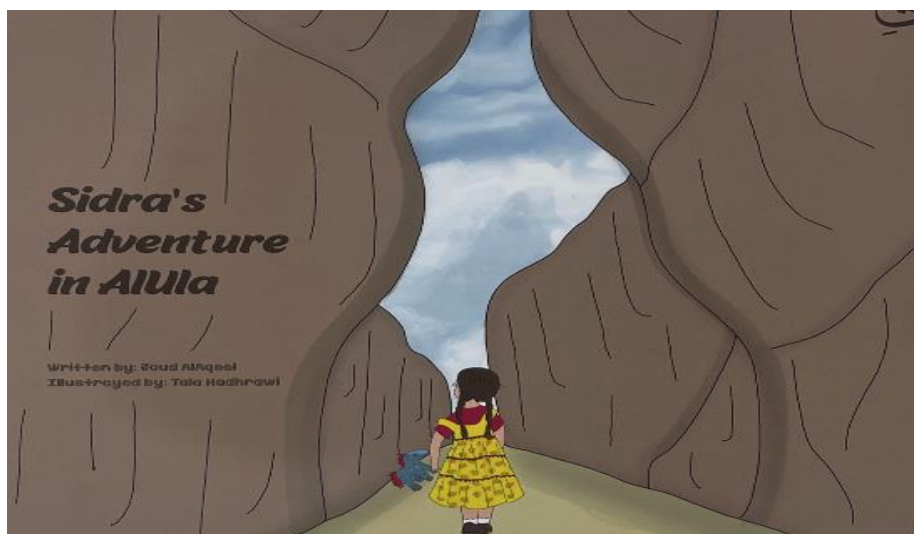
These three categories were chosen because they align with the research questions and offer a logical framework for assessing how peritext mediates narrative access, frames the expectations of the readership, and communicates cultural meaning. Crucially, the analysis focuses on the peritextual presentation of the story and does not take into account the main textual context. This complies with Genette's view that the paratext is a liminal space that frames and mediates the narrative for its readers. Therefore, this study focuses only on the peritextual features of the English version of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*. It does not analyze the main narrative; nor does it consider the Arabic source text. By restricting the scope of the study to the book's visual and textual paratexts, and their contribution to cultural mediation, a focused, detailed, and useful exploration can be carried out to determine the impact of paratextual elements. Qualitative research is inherently interpretive, as is this research; however, the threat of subjectivity in the data analysis process was also acknowledged. To enhance analytical rigor, the analysis was grounded in the theoretical framework developed by Genette, and the interpretations were refined through a process of revisiting the visual and textual data to achieve consistency and reliability.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the ways in which the peritextual features of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* represent Saudi Arabian cultural heritage are examined (focusing specifically on AlUla). The study also examines how such features support cultural identity development for young readers locally and around the world. This research is guided by Genette's (1997) typology of peritextual functions, namely framing, threshold, and culture/ideology.

1. The Title as a Peritextual Gateway to Saudi Culture in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*

Figure 1 Front Book Cover and Title of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*



As seen in Figure 1, the title—*Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*—is a well-constructed peritextual feature that serves a number of different cultural and communicative functions. In

fact, the title is a key feature that will be examined when addressing the research questions, namely determining how peritextual features represent and promote Saudi cultural heritage, and how they support the development of the cultural identity of young individuals locally and around the world.

1.1 Threshold Function: Inviting Readers into a Culturally Situated Narrative

Genette (1997) pointed out that the title serves as a threshold, mediating entry into the story. The name “Sidra” in *Sidra’s Adventure in AlUla* establishes a personalized entry point for readers, instantly suggesting that the narrative is child-centered. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the cultural resonance of “Sidra” goes beyond mere characterization; rather, it also refers to the *Sidr* tree (*Ziziphus spina-christi*), which is native to the Arabian Peninsula and symbolic of local identity, endurance, and deep-rootedness in Arab and Islamic traditions. This creates a feeling of cultural continuity, even before the story commences. The use of the word “adventure” implies movement, exploration, and ongoing learning, which are common topics in children’s literature, thus establishing an accessible bridge for readers from different cultural backgrounds. Further, AlUla places the narrative in a unique cultural and geographic location. Not only is AlUla a major archaeological area in Saudi Arabia, it also serves as a national symbol of cultural revival, as stated in initiatives such as Vision 2030. The use of this name in the title allows the writer to bring the story’s didactic and cultural purpose to the forefront, inviting both Saudi Arabian and international readers to explore the ancient city’s heritage. In turn, this creates an interpretive lens that can be applied when reading the narrative, following a journey of discovery grounded in cultural specificity.

1.2 Framing Function: Influencing Readers’ Expectations of Setting and Culture

The semantic features of the words “Sidra,” “adventure,” and “AlUla” also provide a framework for the narrative’s cultural and thematic scope. The word “AlUla” establishes a sense of familiarity and pride in local (Saudi) readers, strengthening national identity by using spatial and cultural recognition. Meanwhile, for international readers, it creates an educational and exoticized locale, preparing them to become culturally immersed in the story. This framing is consistent with Genette’s belief that the title serves as a “guiding sign” that helps readers to interpret the story. Moreover, narrative tension is induced through the contrast between the universal allure of “adventure” and the particularity of “AlUla,” which enables the reader to unite cultural differences with thematic familiarity, thus promoting intercultural understanding. Additionally, the English title’s linguistic structure and retention of transliterated Arabic elements (e.g., “AlUla”) play a vital role in preserving cultural authenticity, as opposed to modifying it to suit Western consumption needs. This tells Saudi readers that their heritage will be conveyed respectfully, while also preparing international readers to enter a culturally marked space.

1.3 Cultural and Ideological Function: Portraying Saudi Identity and Heritage

The title’s ideological importance cannot be overestimated. Genette (1997) explained that peritextual components have both aesthetic and ideological significance (p. 2). The title *Sidra’s Adventure in AlUla* conveys a clear cultural message that the story is grounded in a narration of Saudi national identity. The use of references to indigenous flora (“Sidra”), geographic heritage (“AlUla”), and female agency (a young girl as the protagonist) evokes cultural offer and continuity for children in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the title reflects wider national objectives. AlUla has been highlighted as an indication of cultural legacy and global engagement under Saudi Arabia’s strategic Vision 2030 initiative. Adding this location to the title of a children’s book promotes the achievement of such objectives by creating an early awareness of national heritage and soft cultural diplomacy. The title thus serves an ideological

function in confirming cultural identity for Saudi children, as well as portraying a curated version of Saudi culture to the rest of the world, a version in which the country is presented as ancient, rich, and deeply associated with land and history.

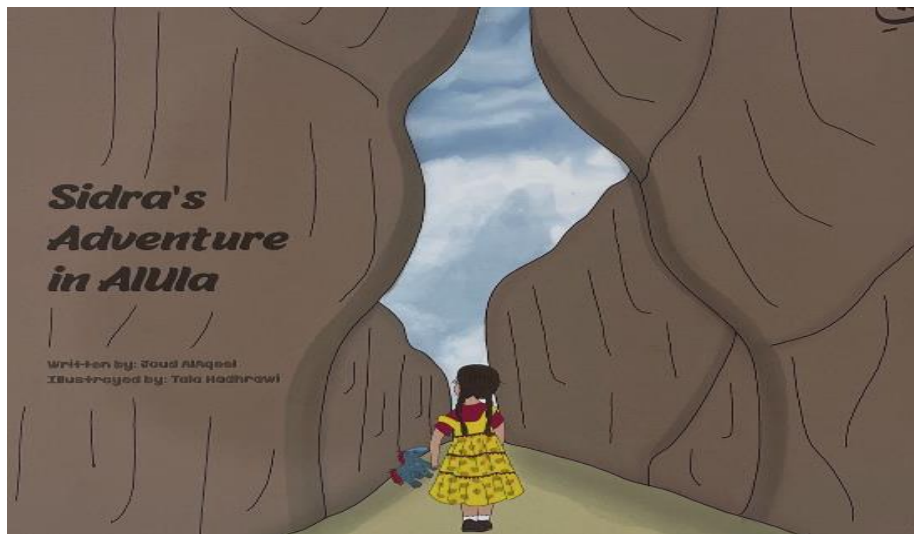
2. Visual Imagery and Illustration as Cultural Signifiers in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*

When used in children's literature, illustrations are not just decorative features; rather, they are critical peritextual tools that affect meaning, thus helping readers with interpretation. They also portray cultural narratives, aligning with Nikolajeva and Scott's (2001) argument concerning the interpretive function of visual elements in children's literature. The illustration on the cover of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* is an important means of connecting readers to the cultural heritage of AlUla and Saudi Arabia. Thus, the illustrations perform framing, threshold, and cultural ideology functions from the perspective of a peritextual lens.

2.1 Threshold Function: Visual Gateway to a Culturally Rich Setting

The illustration on the book cover serves as a threshold, providing readers with their first immersive experience of the story (see Figure 2). The image presents a young girl walking between two tall sandstone cliffs, indicating the iconic archaeological terrain of AlUla. This instantly places the narrative in a visually recognizable and culturally significant landscape. Not only does this present a location, it also lures readers into an imaginative and historical world. Therefore, the story is evidently grounded in heritage and full of discovery. With the use of soft tones and stylized rendering, the illustration appeals to children and encourages engagement, acting as a visual gateway to a rich cultural experience.

Figure 2. Front Book Cover and Title of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* with Visual Illustrations



2.2 Framing Function: Using Iconic Imagery to Shape Expectations

The images presented in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* are crucial to the visual framing of the narrative's cultural setting. As shown in Figure 2, Sidra is seen in a traditional floral yellow dress with red sleeves, suggestive of the local traditional clothing worn by young girls in the area during festive events in Saudi Arabia. Her depiction represents cultural pride and continuity, since floral accessories symbolically connect her to the *Sidr* tree. This reinforces her grounding in AlUla's cultural and natural landscape. This imagery prepares readers, particularly Saudi children, to enter a story that is focused on identity, heritage, and personal growth.

The traditional clothing worn by other characters in the market scene further emphasizes cultural authenticity (Figure 3). A male vendor can be seen wearing traditional Saudi male clothing (a red *shemagh* and white *thobe*). Meanwhile, nearby, women wearing black abayas are depicted carrying shopping bags, illustrating daily life in a familiar and culturally relevant environment. By presenting the story in a way that educates readers and encourages cultural awareness, these visual elements create a realistic portrayal of Saudi societal norms and circumstances. The illustration also contains a surrounding landscape of sandstone cliffs, distant mountains, and mudbrick architecture, indicating the historical and geographical significance of AlUla. Created specifically for young readers, the features effectively convey profound cultural meaning. Thus, before reading any of the text, the peritextual visuals create expectations and promote engagement. The book consequently serves as both a personal story and a cultural relic.

Figure 3. *Traditional Clothing as a Marker of Cultural Authenticity*

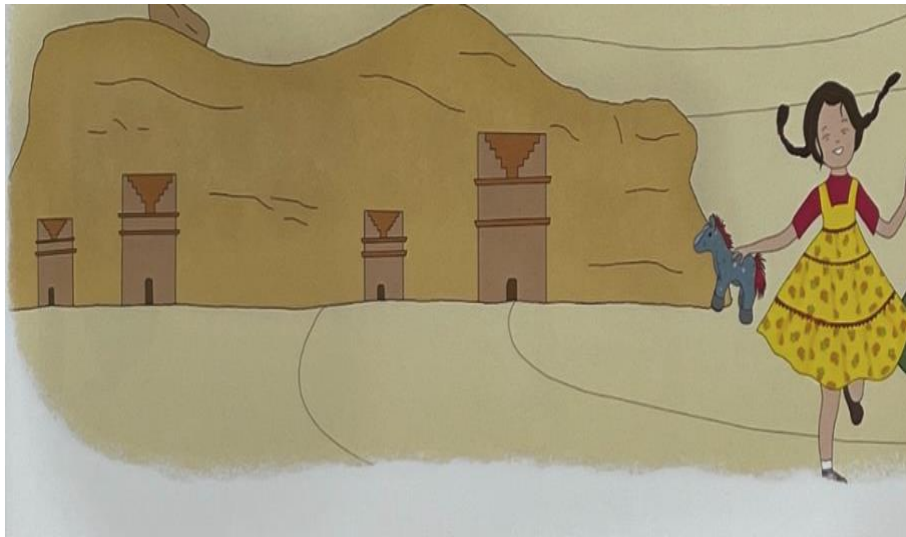


Moreover, the illustrations contain many stylized yet recognizable images of AlUla's iconic landmarks, such as the tombs of Hegra (*Mada'in Salih*), designated as a UNESCO world heritage site. This site is renowned for its monumental Nabataean architecture, which is carved out in sandstone cliffs (Figure 4). The visuals instantly position the story in a culturally significant and historically rich setting, fostering national heritage and pride. The depiction of the tombs anchors the readers to the story, linking the place in the story to a real-life heritage site (Figure 5).

Figure 4. *Tombs of Hegra (Mada'in Salih)*



Figure 5. *Depiction of AIUla Tombs Linking Story to National Heritage*



In addition to heritage, the illustrations depict native Arabian wildlife, such as the Arabian oryx and a falcon, as shown in Figure 6. These two symbols are intricately related to Saudi cultural identity and conservation narratives. The illustration showing Sidra flying on the back of a falcon over canyons populated by oryx implies a combination of fantasy and ecological awareness, highlighting themes such as adventure, freedom, and environmental appreciation. Not only do these visual components teach young children about AIUla's natural and cultural landscape, they also promote Saudi's strategic Vision 2030, which focuses on increasing local tourism and promoting heritage through storytelling.

Figure 6. *Depicting Wildlife and Cultural Identity: The Oryx and Falcon in AIUla's Landscape*



The Hijaz Railway station, a famous site associated with local history and the wider Arab legacy, is depicted in a drawing of a historically significant scene in AIUla in Figure 7. AIUla's historical significance and portrayal as a crossroads of civilizations and trade routes is evident in the station and vintage locomotive, which represent a time of change and connectedness. The traditional clothing worn by Sidra and her mother highlights the cultural continuity and the ties between generations. Meanwhile, they are gazing at the train ahead of them, which suggests themes of travel, discovery, and the merging of the past and future. As well as teaching

young people about the rich history of AlUla and the Hijaz Railway's enduring significance, this illustrated tale highlights the importance of curiosity, family, and cultural preservation in national storytelling.

Figure 7. *Hijaz Railway Station: Linking AlUla's Past, Present, and Future*



The visuals create an interpretative pathway for readers before the story even commences, as has been discussed by several researchers (Arizpe & Styles, 2015; Genette, 1997; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018). The peritext here implies that the narrative will be both entertaining and educational, focusing on cultural symbolism as part of its aesthetic choices. This framing helps local readers to affirm their lived experiences. For international readers, it presents a culturally rich narrative, helping them to understand Saudi landscapes, norms, and values.

2.3 Cultural and Ideological Function: Portraying Saudi Heritage and Identity

The image on the cover of the book serves many cultural and ideological purposes. For example, Sidra's traditional dress suggests Saudi heritage, highlighting the gendered expressions of identity and continuity in national traditions. Moreover, the way in which she is presented walking toward the open light and embarking on a journey is also symbolic, reflecting themes such as enlightenment, progress, and the celebration of rooted, yet developing, cultural values.

Further, the desert landscape and sandstone cliffs are semiotic symbols of AlUla's lasting cultural relevance, mirroring Saudi Arabia's broader initiatives to promote and globalize its legacy under Vision 2030. These visual clues are not objective; rather, they represent an ideological position that cherishes national history and aims to boldly present it to a worldwide audience. As a result, the book serves as a medium for soft power and cultural transfer, portraying AlUla as a representation of pride and heritage, as well as a physical place. The calculated use of peritextual features to assist in the delivery of national discourses and the promotion of cultural diplomacy has comparisons in other institutional translation settings. For example, Zao et al. (2023) examined the Panda Books Series and showed how the book covers create a non-threatening and attractive image of China. Their article highlighted the significance of the interaction between visual and verbal messages in shaping the ideological and communicative objectives of state-subsidized translation programs, which are developed by state institutions, translators, and editors. Their multimodal approach also confirmed the importance of paratexts in achieving such cultural and political goals. In the same vein, the illustration on the cover of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* establishes a sense of pride, affiliation,

and familiarity for children in Saudi Arabia; meanwhile, for international readers, it provides an attractive and respectful insight into a culturally rich and lesser-known area. Thus, this illustration serves two important purposes: it helps to reconcile cultural identity across contexts, and it demonstrates how visual peritext can both validate local culture and appeal to global audiences.

3. The symbolism of Space and Light in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*

In *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*, space and light are presented symbolically on the cover, as shown in Figure 8. This reflects a subtle, yet powerful, peritextual approach that aims to meaningfully represent the cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia and children's negotiation of cultural identity. The portrayal of the open sky between AlUla's towering cliffs serves the three key peritextual functions identified by Genette (1997), namely framing, threshold, and cultural ideology. It also helps to aesthetically and thematically achieve the narrative's objectives.

Figure 8. *Open Sky and Cliffs: Visual Symbolism of Cultural Identity in AlUla*



3.1 Threshold Function: A Visual Introduction to the Narrative

Between the sandstone cliffs, an open passageway can be seen, leading to a luminous sky, evoking both a literal and metaphorical entry to the narrative (Figure 8). This spatial arrangement establishes themes of movement and lures readers, particularly children, into an adventure. Genette (1997) observed that threshold components encourage the initial engagement of readers, after which the picture of Sidra walking toward the light visually dramatizes the start of the journey into the story. This entrance into an open and enticing space implies themes such as learning, transformation, and possibility, which are common themes in children's literature (Oittinen, 2000). The visual symbolism subtly guides young readers to interpret the story, implying that it will explore personal discovery grounded in cultural specificity.

3.2 Framing Function: Composing Interpretive Expectations

The sky is presented in gentle blue and white colors, which generate feelings of peace, hope, and space (Figure 8). This color scheme and the architectural features present the story as an uplifting tale set in a magnificent and illustrious setting, rather than one of imprisonment or restriction. The emotional tone of the passage is heightened by the natural light, which implies that Sidra's voyage is both inward and outward, a symbolic exploration of history, location, and the self. By associating AlUla with symbolic themes of enlightenment and legacy, rather than using it merely as a backdrop, this frame helps to establish the reader's

expectations. The light emerges as a narrative signpost, allowing readers to see the voyage as culturally significant, as opposed to simply aesthetically pleasing.

3.3 Cultural and Ideological Function: Light as a Symbol of Saudi Heritage and Prospective Vision

In addition to its aesthetic importance, the portrayal of light and space on the cover contains profound ideological resonance (Figure 8). AlUla is depicted as a historical landmark, as well as a place of growing significance and national revival. The openness of the sky, along with Sidra's forward movement, reflect Saudi Arabia's wider cultural ambitions under Vision 2030, with the nation reintroducing itself to the world via numerous sectors, including art, culture, education, and tourism. Sidra is shown moving into the light between iconic natural cliffs, thus symbolizing growth, heritage, and the bridging between past and future. This image generates a sense of pride and connection in Saudi children, strengthening their cultural identity. Conversely, it provides a respectful and emotionally relatable entrance into an unfamiliar culture for international readers through the use of discovery and light to make interpretation easier.

4. Publisher's Logo and Cultural Legitimacy in *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*

The logo presented on the front and back covers of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* plays a critical role in establishing the story's peritextual approach, despite its small size and positioning. This component, which can be seen in the upper right-hand corner written in simple Arabic script, strengthens the text's cultural framework and provides it with legitimacy (Figures 9 and 10). Such peritextual features serve communicative purposes that are beyond decorative (Genette, 1997). Thus, the logo helps to symbolize Saudi cultural history and influences how young readers, both domestically and internationally, view the legitimacy and authority of the story.

Figure 9. Front Cover Logo: Reinforcing Cultural Identity and Authenticity

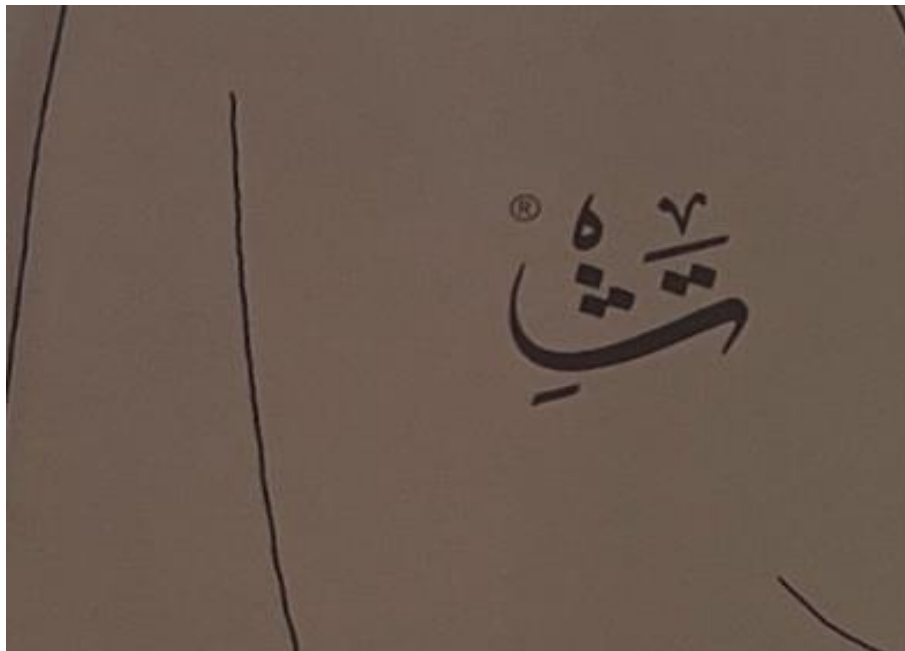


Figure 10. Arabic Script Logo on Back Cover: A Marker of Cultural Authenticity



4.1 Threshold Function: Reflecting Institutional Trust and Entry into a Curated Cultural Space

The publisher's logo serves as an important threshold component, communicating to the reader that the story is part of a wider institutional and literary ecosystem, not simply a private or isolated creation. It suggests that the story is endorsed and supported by a governmental or private entity. The Arabic logo is also depicted on the back cover, accompanied by this statement: "the winner publishing house of the Excellence Award in Publishing for the years 2021-2022 respectively." All of these visual components highlight the credibility, quality, and pedagogical value of the story for young readers and their adult counterparts (i.e., parents, educators, and librarians). The logo can be seen in the text's visual threshold, enabling the reader to grow in confidence and start to engage with the story. Moreover, it situates the narrative inside a national literary tradition, preparing the reader for the story's cultural seriousness and authenticity.

4.2 Framing Function: Highlighting Bilingual and Bicultural Orientation

The design of the logo and the positioning of Arabic text alongside English text in the title support the themes of bilingual and bicultural identity that are inherent in the narrative. This typographical juxtaposition positions the narrative as a culturally hybrid story. Despite being deeply rooted in the Arabic language and heritage, it is still outward facing and appealing to English-speaking readers. In turn, this paves the way for the narrative's cross-cultural communication, preparing readers to embark on a journey in which they will engage with local Saudi themes. Thus, the framing signals the book's cultural positioning and intended audience. As well as providing a respectful and familiar linguistic identity for Saudi readers, it presents a cultural, educational, appealing, and authentic window through which international readers can engage with the story.

4.3 Cultural and Ideological Function: Reinforcing Cultural Authority and National Identity

The logo represents institutional support and cultural legitimacy on an intellectual level and presents the book as a tale with cultural approval, helping to share and preserve the Saudi culture. This is particularly important in light of Saudi Arabia's broader Vision 2030 initiative, which places a strong emphasis on developing national identity via education, the arts, and culture. The story reinforces its cultural authority and national purpose by incorporating the publisher's symbol, particularly one in Arabic script. Moreover, Arabic is not

used in this context for functional purposes only; rather, it is symbolic in that it promotes the primacy of the Arabic language, presenting it as a medium for cultural transmission, even though the main story is delivered in English. The presence of the two languages advances the ideological objective of cultural continuity in a globalized world.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how the peritextual elements of the Saudi cultural heritage-based children's book *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla* help to represent Saudi cultural heritage, and how they are used to negotiate cultural identity among young readers who confront different linguistic and cultural environments. Through the analysis, it was discovered that elements such as the title, cover design and illustrations are more than simply decorative elements of the book. These peritextual elements are an essential part of culture-specific semiotic paraphernalia, which effectively predetermines the interpretive patterns of the readers. Such characteristics are consciously employed to establish Saudi national identity, foster a sense of belonging among local audiences, and invite international readers to explore the historical and cultural richness of AlUla. The inclusion of cultural imagery—including indigenous clothing, familiar desert vistas, and visually evocative depictions of AlUla's historical landmarks (such as the tombs of Hegra)—acts as a robust interpretive narrative tool that immerses the reader in the region's history and culture. Such elements function as more than simple decoration; instead, they actively portray a considered representation of Saudi Arabia's national identity that is founded on authenticity and national pride. The book's vibrant imagery and emblematic peritextual choices reflect the wide-ranging cultural goals of Vision 2030 concerning the preservation of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and the promotion of a modern, globally active Kingdom. Additionally, the paratextual imagery enables the narrative to serve as a cultural mirror for Saudi readers, a diplomatic lens for the global audience, and an instrument for connecting the past and future of Saudi cultural expression.

The findings indicate that the text's peritextual components align with the threshold, framing, and ideological elements of Genette's (1997) theoretical framework. When considering RQ1, AlUla's cultural legacy is emphasized via the use of an imaginative, age-appropriate approach in the text that resonates with Saudi national discourse. In response to RQ2, the use of bilingual text and culturally appropriate imagery creates a twofold reading experience: for Saudi readers, it affirms their cultural identity; for non-native readers, it provides an accessible cultural narrative. The institutional legitimacy and the pedagogical objectives of the text are reinforced by the inclusion of the Arabic language and the publisher's logo, both of which contribute to the authenticity and educational value of the narrative. By establishing the significance of peritextual elements as vehicles for cultural transmission and identity formation, this study makes a significant contribution to the fields of translation studies and children's literature. Through its comprehensive analysis of *Sidra's Adventure in AlUla*, this research highlights how peritextual features (such as titles, illustrations, cover design, and publisher branding) frame the text, while simultaneously influencing the book's cultural messaging and interpretive reception. These peritextual features bridge the gap between the source and target cultures by fostering cultural appreciation and promoting national narratives. The results reinforce the importance of peritextual details in building and maintaining cultural discourse, as observed in previous studies on the mediational value of paratext in children's literature translations (e.g., Gürçağlar, 2002; Van Coillie & McMartin, 2020). This enhances the usefulness of paratextual analysis in translation studies.

Although this study deliberately analyzed the English peritextual aspects of a single translated text, it provides a comprehensive description of how these aspects serve as semiotic and ideological tools for building and popularizing Saudi cultural identity. The research

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contributes to the emerging body of paratextual studies, particularly in the understudied context of Arabic-English children's literature. It emphasizes the emergence of deliberate peritextual design and urges translators, publishers, and cultural institutions to view covers, titles, and illustrations as a strategic means of creating a national identity, attracting young readers, and supporting the cultural aspirations of Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia. Future studies should consider comparative analyses of a larger number of Saudi translated picture books, determine how young audiences interpret peritextual elements, and explore the effects of epitextual materials, including marketing materials, interviews with authors or translators, and the role and reception of translated stories.

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بناء الهوية الثقافية السعودية: دراسة تحليلية لـ "عتبات النص" في ترجمة كتاب الأطفال "مغامرة سدر في العلا" إلى اللغة الإنجليزية

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المستخلص

تُعَدُّ ترجمة أدب الأطفال رافداً مهماً في تشكيل الهوية الثقافية وتعزيز الوعي الوطني، لا سيّما حين تُترجم هذه الأعمال بين اللغات والثقافات. وتتعلق هذه الدراسة من رؤية نقدية تحليلية تستند إلى نظرية العالم الأدبي الفرنسي جيرار جينيت المعروفة بـ "عتبات النص" *Paratexts*، لترصد الدور الذي تنهض به العناصر الموازية للنص - كالعنوان، والغلاف، والرسوم التوضيحية، وملاحظات الناشر - في تشكيل صورة رمزية للهوية الثقافية السعودية في أدب الأطفال المترجم. وتتخذ هذه الدراسة من كتاب مغامرة سدر في العلا نموذجاً تطبيقياً، لسبر أغوار النصوص الموازية ودورها المحوري في نقل تراث العلا الثقافي والترويج للهوية الوطنية السعودية بأساليب رمزية مؤثرة. كما تركز الدراسة على منهج نوعي تحليلي يُعنى بالمنتج النصي، مستقصياً دور عتبات النص في تشكيل الإطار التفسيري لدى القارئ الناشئ وتعزيز السرديات الثقافية. وتُبرز نتائج البحث أهمية التكوين البصري والنصي للكتاب المترجم في ترسيخ الهوية السعودية، وفتح آفاق للحوار بين الثقافات. ولا يقتصر تحليل عتبات النص الأساسي على البعد الجمالي فحسب، بل يكشف الستار عن وظائف سردية ثقافية عميقة، تُسهم في نقل الأيديولوجيات والتوجهات التربوية والثقافية الكامنة في النص المترجم إلى القارئ. وتُسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء مجالي دراسات الترجمة وأدب الطفل، من خلال تسليط الضوء على الدور المهم لعتبات النص في تشكيل المعنى الثقافي، وتأثيرها المباشر في تجربة التلقي لدى القارئ الناشئ. وتكمن القيمة التطبيقية لهذه الدراسة التحليلية في إمداد المترجمين والناشرين ومطوري المناهج برؤية ثاقبة وواعية بالسياقات الثقافية، مما يعزز من دور الترجمة في نقل الجوانب الحضارية من لغة إلى أخرى. كما تفتح هذه الدراسة آفاقاً رحبة أمام دراسات مستقبلية تستقصي الأبعاد السيميائية للتكوين البصري والنصي في النصوص المترجمة، واستثمارها في بناء خطاب نقدي للثقافات يُسهم في تشكيل الهوية الذاتية وتعزيز النقاها الحضاري.

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