



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 8.428 (SJIF 2026)

“Anglophone Writing in Omani Literature: Cultural Identity and Linguistic Adaptation”

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DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doilink/01.2026-73561939/IRJHIS2601014>

Abstract:

This study looks at how Anglophone writing shapes and expresses Omani cultural identity in today's globalized world. We analyzed works by Jokha Alharthi, Abdulaziz Al-Farsi, Huda Hamed, and other Omani writers to understand how English works as a medium for literary expression and cultural negotiation. What makes Omani Anglophone literature different from broader Arab writing is its introspective focus—these works examine internal societal changes rather than diasporic experiences. We looked at tradition versus modernity, gender dynamics, and linguistic hybridity, paying attention to how English loanwords and narrative adaptations blend with Arabic literary heritage. Anglophone Omani literature does more than just communicate across cultures; it preserves indigenous heritage while giving Omani storytelling a place in global literary conversations. This research adds to ongoing discussions about World Englishes and literary production in the Arab Gulf region.

Keywords: Omani literature, Anglophone writing, cultural identity, linguistic adaptation, globalization, World Englishes, Arab Gulf literature, postcolonial studies

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, Omani literature has gone through major changes. These transformations reflect how the nation's culture and politics have evolved as globalization picks up speed. The rise of Anglophone writing—works written in English or translated from Arabic into English—stands out as particularly significant. This development raises questions about language choice, cultural representation, and identity in a postcolonial setting.

English keeps expanding as a global lingua franca. Omani writers' adoption of it gives us a unique perspective on how local heritage intersects with global influence. Several interconnected factors have driven this linguistic shift: mass media's widespread influence, socio-political dynamics, economic pressures, and technological advancements (Al-Abri, 2022). The geographical proximity and coexistence of expatriate communities in Oman have promoted intercultural and linguistic

exchanges, enriching both languages at various levels.

One key outcome of this linguistic interaction is lexical borrowing—words and phrases get adopted from one language and integrated into another. This exchange doesn't just expand vocabulary; it reflects how language evolves in response to cultural and social influences (Algryani & Syahrin, 2023).

This paper explores Anglophone writing in Oman as a space where cultural and linguistic negotiations happen. Through this medium, authors articulate Omani identity while connecting with international readers. We examine how Omani traditions, societal transformations, and linguistic adaptations appear in Anglophone writing. We also look at how language functions as a tool for negotiating the space between cultural heritage and contemporary influences. Drawing on World Englishes theory and postcolonial literary studies, we analyze how Omani writers navigate tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global spheres, and Arabic and English languages.

Literature Review:

Cultural Identity in Anglophone Omani Literature:

Plenty of research explores how Omani writers use English to represent their cultural heritage, traditions, and societal transitions. Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* highlights the complexities of Omani identity, intergenerational tensions, and the negotiation between modernity and tradition (Alharthi, 2018). Originally written in Arabic as *Sayyidat al-Qamar* (Ladies of the Moon), Marilyn Booth translated it into English, making it the first novel by an Omani woman available to English readers.

Alharthi employs nonlinear narratives that blend local cultural elements with universal human experiences in both *Celestial Bodies* and *Bitter Orange Tree* (Alharthi, 2022). Her work emphasizes the complexities of women's roles in Omani society, showing their struggles and resilience in a patriarchal environment (Al-Azri, 2023). This focus on women's perspectives enriches global understanding of gender dynamics within Arab cultures. Scholars have widely analyzed the novel for its nuanced portrayal of Omani society and its use of nonlinear narrative structures to convey cultural complexity (Al-Hinaai, 2021).

Linguistic Adaptation and English's Influence:

English's lexical influence on contemporary Omani Arabic represents a significant research area. Algryani and Syahrin's (2023) review of Anglicisms in Omani Arabic provides insight into how English loanwords integrate within the local linguistic landscape, particularly in education, business, and technology sectors. These linguistic shifts appear not only in everyday communication but also in literary expression, where authors incorporate English phrases, hybrid linguistic forms, and code-switching to reflect Omani society's evolving linguistic realities.

However, limited research exists on how these linguistic adaptations manifest in Anglophone

Omani literature, which points to a need for more scholarly inquiry (Salim & Al-Kindi, 2021). The continuity between Arabic literary heritage and contemporary Anglophone literature enhances global appreciation for Omani storytelling.

Distinctive Dimensions of Omani Anglophone Literature:

Omani Anglophone literature roots itself deeply in the nation's unique history, oral traditions, and cultural identity. Unlike broader Arab Anglophone literature, which frequently explores pan-Arab or diasporic experiences, Omani works prioritize local identity by showcasing the nation's cultural richness, societal shifts, and geographic uniqueness, as exemplified in Bushra Khalfan's *Dilshad* (Al-Balushi, 2020).

Thematically, Omani literature looks inward. It focuses on internal societal transformations rather than exile or alienation, blending traditional storytelling with contemporary issues to resonate with diverse audiences. Stylistically, it draws heavily from oral and poetic traditions, creating culturally grounded narratives like Zahran al-Qasimi's *Hunger for Honey*. This contrasts with the linguistic hybridity and code-switching often found in other Arab Anglophone works (Hassan & Al-Kharusi, 2022).

Omani literature remains relatively underrepresented globally, with limited translations available. Jokha Alharthi's international recognition marked a breakthrough for Oman compared to countries like Egypt, which have long-established traditions of translation and global literary presence (Mahmoud, 2019).

Globalization's Impact on Anglophone Omani Writing:

Globalization has been instrumental in broadening Omani literature's reach and impact by positioning local narratives within wider global literary frameworks. Beyond Alharthi, works by Abdulaziz Al-Farsi's *Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs* (Al-Farsi, 2013) and Huda Hamed's *Things Are Not Where They Should Be* (Hamed, 2009) have reached international readers through English translations, addressing universal themes while retaining their cultural specificity. Hamed's short story won both the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity and the Best Omani Publication Award in 2009. Her novel *Who Counts the Stairs* (Hamed, 2014) emerged as one of six works cultivated during a writers' workshop led by Najwa Barakat and was subsequently published by Dar al-Adab.

Aisha al-Saifi's poem "Like Any Messiah Taken Unaware by Death," translated by Robin Moger, joins the corpus of Omani Anglophone literature, expanding its global reach. The poem reflects Omani writers' engagement with life, death, and spirituality while preserving cultural authenticity. Reem Allawati's *Electronic Thorns*, translated by Ghayde Ghraowi, presents a reflection on existence, examining fragility, decay, and the interaction between the physical and digital.

Badriya Al-Badri's *Shadow of Hermaphroditus* was translated into English by Ghayde Ghraowi and featured in the anthology *Unsettled: New Writing from Oman*. Her work often combines classical

and colloquial Arabic poetry with contemporary themes. The anthology's central theme of "unsettlement" addresses issues like displacement, identity, and loss while staying deeply connected to Omani experiences, including the relationship between tradition and modernity, varied gender identities, and diaspora challenges. Abdulaziz al-Omairi's poem "Repentance," translated by Rawad Wehbe, powerfully explores themes of guilt, loss, and the longing for forgiveness.

Platforms like Words Without Borders and Banipal have been instrumental in promoting Omani literature by translating and publishing works by Omani authors for English-speaking audiences. These initiatives have been crucial in diversifying global perceptions of Gulf literature, often overshadowed by the literary output of larger Arab nations (Al-Saadi, 2024). Awards such as the Bait AlGhasham DarArab Translation Prize highlight the growing recognition of Arabic literature's global significance and emphasize translation's role in making Omani narratives accessible to wider audiences.

The 2019 Man Booker International Prize awarded to *Celestial Bodies* marked a significant milestone, drawing global attention to Omani literature (Alharthi, 2018). This increased visibility raises questions about cultural authenticity and potential commodification. Yet Omani writers navigate these challenges by emphasizing local narratives and resisting simplistic representations, thereby asserting cultural agency in the global literary marketplace (Mansour, 2020).

Research Gaps:

While existing scholarship on Omani literature offers valuable insights into cultural identity and globalization, significant gaps remain. There's a lack of in-depth analysis on how Anglophone literature addresses generational shifts and younger writers' evolving perspectives (Ahmed, 2021). While works like Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* and Al-Farsi's *Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs* explore modernization themes, more research is needed to understand how emerging authors reflect rapid cultural transitions in the context of digitalization (Al-Muqbali, 2022; Al-Rashdi, 2024).

Methodology:

This study uses qualitative research design centered on textual analysis and literary criticism. The primary corpus includes Anglophone Omani literary works—novels, short stories, and poetry—written in English or translated from Arabic. Key texts include:

- Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* (trans. Marilyn Booth) and *Bitter Orange Tree* (trans. Marilyn Booth)
- Abdulaziz Al-Farsi's *Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs* (trans. Nancy Roberts)
- Huda Hamed's *Things Are Not Where They Should Be* and *Who Counts the Stairs*
- Short stories and poems featured in *Unsettled: New Writing from Oman*

We selected these works for their cultural and linguistic significance and their reception in both local and global literary circles. Our analysis identifies recurring themes related to cultural identity,

tradition versus modernity, gender, and globalization. We examine linguistic features: English loanwords, code-switching, and narrative techniques reflecting Arabic storytelling traditions.

Secondary sources include scholarly articles, book chapters, and critical reviews providing theoretical and contextual frameworks. Postcolonial theory, sociolinguistics, and World Englishes studies inform our multidimensional analysis.

Discussion:

Cultural Identity and Narrative Introspection:

Anglophone Omani literature distinguishes itself through its introspective focus on local identity and societal change. Where diasporic narratives explore displacement and alienation, Omani works root themselves in national context. They examine tradition-modernity tensions from within. Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* uses a multigenerational narrative to trace Omani society's transformation, revealing personal and collective struggles tied to rapid modernization (Alharthi, 2018). This inward perspective lets Omani writers present nuanced, authentic representations of their cultural heritage, challenging homogenizing perceptions of the Arab world (Al-Hinaai, 2021).

The historical context matters here. Omani literature evolved from traditional oral storytelling and Arabic poetry to include Anglophone works, influenced by 1970s educational reforms under Sultan Qaboos (Al-Balushi, 2020). These changes, along with globalization, shaped how Omani literary expression developed. Writers now utilize English to preserve heritage while engaging with global discourse, making English both a bridge and a battleground for cultural identity.

Linguistic Adaptation and Hybridity:

English use in Omani literature demonstrates linguistic adaptation and hybridity. Writers incorporate English loanwords and phrases into narratives, reflecting contemporary Oman's sociolinguistic reality where English permeates education, business, and technology (Algryani & Syahrin, 2023). But it goes beyond just lexical borrowing. Omani authors experiment more deeply by adapting Arabic narrative structures and poetic devices to English prose.

This trans creative process produces a unique literary style that blends Arabic's rhythmic and symbolic qualities with English's expressive possibilities (Al-Abri, 2022). Such hybridity enriches the literary text while metaphorically representing broader cultural negotiations in Omani society. In Omani literature, English functions not only as a tool for global communication but also as a site of linguistic hybridity and cultural negotiation. Code-switching appears frequently, and bilingualism shapes narrative voice in distinctive ways (Salim & Al-Kindi, 2021).

Translation plays a crucial role too. Marilyn Booth's translations of Alharthi's works, Nancy Roberts' translation of Al-Farsi, and the various translators featured in *Unsettled* all serve as mediators between cultures. They make Omani narratives accessible while attempting to preserve their cultural essence—a delicate balancing act that translation studies scholars continue to debate.

Gender and Generational Dynamics:

Gender and generational dynamics form central themes in Anglophone Omani literature. Female authors particularly have used English to explore women's experiences and challenge patriarchal norms. Huda Hamed's short stories often depict female protagonists navigating traditional constraints while asserting agency in a changing world (Hamed, 2009). Alharthi's work emphasizes the complexities of women's roles in Omani society, showcasing their struggles and resilience in a patriarchal environment (Al-Azri, 2023).

Intergenerational conflict recurs as a motif, symbolizing clashes between conservative values and progressive aspirations (Hassan & Al-Kharusi, 2022). These themes resonate globally while retaining cultural specificity, demonstrating Anglophone writing's potential for fostering cross-cultural empathy and understanding. The younger generation of writers brings fresh perspectives shaped by digital platforms and globalized education (Al-Muqbali, 2022). Their work reflects rapid cultural transitions in ways that differ from earlier writers, though more research is needed in this area (Al-Rashdi, 2024).

Globalization and Literary Circulation:

Globalization has been pivotal in circulating and receiving Anglophone Omani literature. International literary prizes, translation initiatives, and digital platforms have amplified Omani writers' visibility, enabling them to reach broader audiences. The Man Booker International Prize awarded to *Celestial Bodies* in 2019 marked a watershed moment, drawing global attention to Omani literature (Alharthi, 2018).

Global publishing networks and platforms like Words Without Borders and Banipal have made Omani literature accessible to international readers (Al-Saadi, 2024). Translation initiatives like the Bait AlGhasham DarArab Translation Prize recognize the importance of making Arabic literature available in English. Digital platforms also play an increasingly important role in promoting Omani literature among youth and international audiences (Ahmed, 2021).

Yet this increased visibility raises questions about cultural authenticity and potential commodification. There's always a risk that global markets might prefer certain narratives over others or that translation might dilute cultural specificity. Omani writers navigate these challenges by emphasizing local narratives and resisting simplistic representations, thereby asserting cultural agency in the global literary marketplace (Mansour, 2020). They demonstrate that English can serve not as a replacement for Arabic but as a complementary medium for creative expression and cross-cultural dialogue.

Conclusion:

Anglophone writing in Oman represents a dynamic literary phenomenon that engages with cultural identity, linguistic adaptation, and globalization in meaningful ways. Through postcolonial

theory and sociolinguistic lenses, our research shows how Omani authors use English as a complementary medium for creative expression and cross-cultural dialogue rather than a replacement for Arabic.

The introspective focus on local society, innovative linguistic hybridity, and exploration of gender and generational themes collectively create a distinctive literary corpus that enriches both Omani and global literary landscapes. Works by Alharthi, Al-Farsi, Hamed, and others demonstrate how Anglophone literature can bridge local heritage and global audiences, facilitating mutual understanding and challenging stereotypical perceptions of the Arab world.

As Oman navigates modernization and globalization's complexities, its literary production offers valuable insights into ongoing identity and cultural negotiations. The historical context—from oral traditions through educational reforms to contemporary digital platforms—shows how Omani literature has adapted while maintaining its cultural distinctiveness (Al-Balushi, 2020). The role of translation, global publishing networks, and international recognition has positioned Omani literature within contemporary world literature while raising important questions about authenticity and representation.

Future research could explore several directions. Digital media's role in promoting Anglophone Omani literature deserves more attention, particularly given younger writers' engagement with online platforms (Ahmed, 2021; Al-Muqbali, 2022). The emergence of new literary genres, including climate fiction or feminist narratives specific to the Gulf context, would be worth investigating. Comparative studies with other Gulf literatures could reveal regional patterns and distinctive national characteristics. Finally, more work is needed on how younger Omani writers reflect rapid cultural transitions in the context of digitalization (Al-Rashdi, 2024).

This study affirms Anglophone writing's significance as a vital component of contemporary Omani cultural expression. It demonstrates that literature can bridge cultural gaps and foster deeper understanding of identity in our interconnected world, preserving Oman's heritage while engaging with global audiences and contributing to the worldwide literary conversation.

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