
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Recreating Orality: Cultural and Performative Aspects in Lebbady's Translation of Moroccan Folktales into English

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| ABSTRACT

This article investigates the translation of the cultural and performative aspects in one Moroccan folktale, "**Aisha the Carpenter's Daughter**", translated into English by Hasna Lebbady. Using a descriptive analytical framework, this article sheds light on the translation strategies employed to render the cultural and performative aspects of Moroccan folktales. The findings of this article show that Lebbady, as a Moroccan translator, highlights eight Moroccan cultural aspects in the folktale, where transliteration is extensively used. Additionally, orality is intensified by transcreating the opening and closing formulae, rhythmic verbal exchanges between characters, and instances of dialogue. The article demonstrates that preserving both the cultural and performative aspects not only captures the source culture and transmits a story but also recreates the orality and performability of the translated folktale.

| KEYWORDS

Orality, performance, culture, translation, Moroccan folktales, transcreation

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In his explanation of orality, Walter Ong starts with the very first period when different societies did not have any means of writing or printing, or even the possibility of it. They just rely on asking each other and recalling what others have said (Abe Aboud, 2014). Therefore, before the existence of writing, the only way to communicate, transmit, and accumulate knowledge was through orality. In his introduction to his book *The Last Storytellers*, Hamilton (2011) explains that as language appeared more than a million years ago, the first written documents existed since 3500 BC. It is the period between the existence of language and written documents, which we can mark as the period of primary orality, where there is no existence of writing (Hamilton, 2011). Therefore, Writing and printing are both new experiences for the human mind, for they can write their oral records in a linear and logical way using chains and connections between ideas. Orality then refers to the verbal culture of oral societies.

Oral genres differ from one country to another. For example, in Morocco, there are proverbs, poems, folktales, children's songs, hymns, and prayers. Sadiqi (2014) identifies four Berber female oral genres, which are a part of the Moroccan orality: poetry, songs, folktales, and public oratory. She identifies each genre in terms of its themes and the setting associated with it. Starting with the first two genres, which are poems and songs, they are usually sung while women are weaving carpets or working in fields. The next genre is folktales, which are described by the author as a projection of the storyteller's cultural and social background, as well as their life experiences. She also portrays folktales as a mixture of human and supernatural characters, as well as their richness in terms of different themes and subplots. Marketplace public oratory *-halqa-* is the fourth genre identified by Sadiqi as she describes the *halqa's* discourse as an audience-engaging discourse through different oral performances, monologues, blessings, oaths, taboo words, and expressions.

Researchers and translators tend to document orality, specifically folktales, to shed light on the cultural and linguistic heritage of oral societies. When rendering folktales, translators adopt different translation strategies to transmit their different aspects successfully. While many approaches tend to prioritize the transmission of cultural aspects of folktales over the performative, the present article investigates how the cultural and performative aspects of Moroccan folktales are rendered through the analysis of one Moroccan folktale translated by Hasna Lebbady, *"Aisha the Carpenter's daughter"*.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Translating the Cultural Aspects of Orality

Orality is a valuable archive of culture. Translators adopt various translation strategies to transmit the cultural aspects embedded in the different oral genres. This part is going to highlight different views related to translating the cultural aspects of orality.

Mohanty (2021) claims that the translation process becomes more challenging if the social distance between the source and target languages is high. Therefore, most translators tend to naturalize the source language to make the target text socially and culturally adjusted to the target readers. He supports his claim through what Werner and Campbell (1970) state that decentering the source text renders the latter natural and smooth in the target language (as cited in Mohanty, 2021, p.2). The author adds that the idea of naturalizing a source text is also emphasized by Venuti, as both fluency and transparency are two main criteria that contribute to successfully conveying the source text to the target readers. Venuti (1992) calls this strategy a fluent translation strategy (as cited in Mohanty, 2021, p.2).

Tymoczko (1995) claims that the translator's task becomes more challenging when an oral genre is involved, since the form and content are not familiar to the receiving audience. Here, translators are concerned with the textualization and interpretation of the content, which consists of the cultural norms, values, and practices of the source culture (p.12). Tymoczko (1995) suggests two main paths. First, partial or popular translation, which involves selecting what aspects to translate, be they cultural, social, or narrative, such as selecting the most culturally familiar features that are more familiar to target readers. Second, translators can opt for scholarly translation that involves including footnotes, introductions, and glossaries to explain the cultural aspects to prepare the receiving audience for the new context.

This aligns with what Varma (2021) explains: when translating orality, different cultural terms may not be accessible to target readers. Therefore, the challenge in translating orality is keeping cultural references that represent the source language and culture. Here, the researcher emphasizes that translators can fill the gap between the source and target languages through domestication by keeping the target text simple and culturally accessible to the receiving audience while explaining some cultural terms by means of glossaries and footnotes. Consequently, combining domestication and foreignization will open the target text to two types of receiving audiences. The first are readers who prefer getting familiar with the source culture, and the second are readers who enjoy discovering new cultures through exploring the lore of the different societies (p.61). However, Varma (2021) adds that foreignization is a preferred translation practice when it comes to translating orality, as native translators of the source text tend to come up with a work of cultural restoration by means of enhancing the cultural and linguistic differences (p.61).

Similarly, Haring (2012) claims that the differences between the source and target language and culture should not be concealed but highlighted and celebrated (p.10). In other words, the researcher emphasizes that recent translations of the different oral genres tend to subject and develop language to highlight these cultural differences. Highlighting the cultural aspects of the source culture is also emphasized by Lukić et al. (2019), as the researchers claim that orality is the main foundation to explore the cultural heritage of oral societies. Therefore, the value of translating oral genres is to highlight the cultural practices and values of the source culture. Lukić et al. (2019) reinforce this idea by mentioning the project of collecting, recording, and translating the German folktales by the Grimm Brothers, as their main motivation is to keep and conserve the German cultural heritage (p.260).

Tymoczko (2020) demonstrates that translators should combine and harmonize the two translation tendencies when translating orality. When translating the latter, translators tend to create a similar experience of fairy tales for the receiving audience. At the same time, translators also foreignize these folktales to drag the receiving audience to a new cultural milieu, as the added value of reading or exploring the orality of a certain society is getting to know its cultural practices and values (p.226).

2.2. Performative Aspects of Orality in Translation

Jerome Rothenberg is a poet, translator, and anthologist. One of his main interests is ethnopoeitics, which aims to record and transcribe oral poetry performatives and oral aspects that can be lost in the written version. Rothenberg claims that all the aspects of oral literature are translatable, as he states that "Translation is a carry—over. It is a means of delivery & of bringing to life. It begins with a forced change of language, but a change too that opens up the possibility of greater understanding; everything in these songs—poems is finally translatable: words, sounds, voice, melody, gesture, event, etc." (Rothenberg, n.d.p.9).

Coillie (2014) claims that read-aloud qualities, oral and aural features are the most important and most challenging aspects to be transmitted when translating folktales, as they keep the latter alive through different target languages. Preserving the performative features renders the translated folktales catchy, easy to memorize, and smooths their performance in the target languages. Collie (2014) introduces three main terms when rendering orality: translation, adaptation, and retelling. These concepts have different intervention levels when rendering folktales. While translation aims to render the form and meaning of a source text, translation by adaptation and retelling takes the source text as a starting point to recreate a new text by reworking, editing, and recontextualizing the source text in a new cultural milieu, and coming up with a new text for a new audience. What separates translation by adaptation from retelling is the degree of the translator's intervention.

The oral and performative aspects of orality always put translators in a dilemma. Clements (1981) clarifies that when transmuting oral performances, translators face two main trajectories. First, they attempt to recreate the orality of the source text in the target text using the extensive description of context and labanotation to describe body language. Second, translators can be satisfied with transmitting the message or the content of the oral performance that lacks oral aspects (p.193). Ten Berge (1982) claims that the main focus of translators when rendering oral poetry or any oral narrative is meaning. Consequently, to create a new text of different oral genres in the target languages, translators shall first master the linguistic aspects and grasp the cultural elements that a specific oral genre consists of. The author adds that including comments within translation is necessary as target readers are in the face of a new, different cultural code or frame (p.243). Here, the author tries to convince his readers that the translators shall tolerate the loss of the performative aspects which distinguish oral genres in general and replace what is lost by what can be read.

It can be noted that translators adopt different translation approaches that align with their translation decisions. The different views discussed demonstrate that some translation approaches prioritize the cultural aspects over the performative, as translators tolerate the loss of the performative aspects as the translation captures the cultural "flavors" of the source material.

2.3. Recreating Orality through Translation

Roth (1998) explains that considering the translation of oral genres as a creative process should not underestimate the task of translators and their linguistic skills to make this creative process possible, as translators tend to make unfamiliar words and sounds accessible to the target readers or add or omit certain elements to render the reading process in the target language smooth and accessible. This aligns with the scope of the present article, as the latter aims to demonstrate how translators recreate and capture orality in the written form by means of highlighting the cultural aspects and transcreating the performative ones.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Different Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators and researchers document Moroccan orality, specifically folktales. Hasna Lebbady is one of the Moroccan translators who record Moroccan folktales into English. In her work entitled "*Feminist Traditions in Andalus-Moroccan Oral Narratives*," she translates seven folktales that revolve around the eloquence and witty plans of female characters. Lebbady's translation decisions in highlighting the cultural themes and the performative features like the opening and closing formulae make her the primary and relevant data for the present article to investigate the translation of the cultural and performative aspects of Moroccan folktales.

Upon closer examination of Lebbady's collection of seven folktales, "*Aisha the Carpenter's daughter*" was selected. The folktale contains dense examples of transliteration, and it perfectly demonstrates the performative features, offering a fertile site to investigate how cultural aspects are translated and how performative aspects are transcreated.

3.2 Data Analysis

This article employs a descriptive analytical framework to explore the translation strategies used to render the cultural and performative aspects of the studied folktale. The analysis starts with extracting the cultural aspects like social rituals and cultural practices, and the performative aspects such as the opening and closing formulae. These aspects are then described and analyzed to determine how they intensify orality within the folktale.

3.2.1. Folktale's synopsis

The folktale entitled "*Aisha the carpenter's daughter*" narrates the story of Aisha, who outsmarts and tricks the Sultan's son using her eloquence and remarkable intelligence. The analysis section will shed light on two main parts. The first one is the cultural aspects highlighted in Lebbady's translation and how the translator renders each cultural aspect to the receiving audience. The second part is going to explore the performative aspects that mark the orality of the folktale.

3.2.2. The Cultural Aspects

Characters and Setting: These elements are described by means of different terms that refer to Moroccan culture. Characters are named using Moroccan popular names such as Aicha and Mohamed. In addition, within the folktale, these characters address themselves by adding titles before their proper names, such as Lalla Aicha and Sidi Mohamed. These titles are used by Moroccans to call others, showing respect, especially for elders, as well as being used to address members from royal backgrounds to show respect. The translator situates the events of the story by mentioning different places, moving from general to specific. To illustrate this idea, when introducing the main characters, Lebbady locates their houses in the *Medina*, then moves to describe Aicha's house, specifying *Settah*, *metmoura*, and *Daw el-hilqa*. These terms are transliterated and then explained in English within the folktale. These transliterated terms are used only in the initial situation; then the translator uses the terrace for "Settah" for the rest of the folktale. Hence, characters' naming and the description of the events' location situate the folktale within the Moroccan context.

Governing Roles: Lebbady points out different governing roles. She uses the Sultan, viziers, and servants. Even though the different governing roles are manifested, the aspect of hierarchy is absent since the interactions are between the commons, the merchant's daughter, and the royals, the Sultan's son. In addition, the events of the folktale revolve around a carpenter's daughter and the Sultan's son, where we can perceive challenging attitudes towards the Sultan's son through Aicha's acts and reactions.

Female Social and Educational Role: The translator mentions one female social and educational role, which is the *dada*. This term carries cultural weight in Moroccan culture, as it refers to a female lifelong servant and 'second mother' in Moroccan households. The translator renders this term as a nurse or servant.

Moroccan Traditional Cosmetic or beauty products, such as *k'hol* and *Henna*. Both products are mentioned to describe how Aicha was preparing and beautifying her eyes and hands. To render these terms, Lebbady once again settles for transliteration.

Traditional Female Handicrafts: Lebbady highlights two traditional female handicrafts, which are embroidery and *Henna* art. These two female activities are involved in the motion of events. The former handicraft, embroidery, is pointed out through the embroidered purse given to Aicha by the Sultan on his first trip. The second handicraft, *henna* art, is through the preparation of Aicha, as she calls the henna artist, to decorate her hands.

Private Tutoring: The translator describes the Sultan as a Qur'an or holy book reader. This implies the private tutoring of royals, where learning the holy book is one of its founding practices. This frames the religious background of the main character.

The diversity of the Moroccan society: The translator calls attention to the Jewish vendor as one of the characters involved in the events of the story. This marks the existence of the Jewish community in Morocco and its coexistence with Moroccans; this is illustrated within the folktale through the interaction between Aicha and the Jewish fish vendor.

The Dimension of Femininity is manifested through the cunning of the female main character and her eloquence. This is portrayed within the folktale through the eloquent rhythmic conversation of the female main character, Aicha, and her cunning tricks to deceive the Sultan.

This dimension is the thread to the second part of the analysis to explore the eloquent rhythmic phrases and other performative aspects preserved in Lebbady's translation.

3.2.3. The Performative Aspects

The Opening and Closing Formulae: Lebbady keeps the opening formulae of Moroccan folktales with its rhythmic feature. Yet, she reworks them to blur any cultural aspects or terms that may make their understanding difficult for the target readers. She frees these phrases from the usual elements we find in opening phrases like invocation and blessings on the Prophet, to settle for phrases that do not refer to any cultural aspects. These opening phrases are the following:

"There was upon a time until there was

A world that exists not and really does." (Lebbady, 2009, p. 29).

Moving to the closing formulae, the translator settles for including one of the common Moroccan closings. The following example shows the closing formulae of Lebbady's translation:

"So we left them with their deed

And came home to eat our trid." (Lebbady, 2009, p. 39)

Lebbady (2009) keeps the opening and closing formulae by preserving their structure and rhythm.

Rhythmic Verbal Exchange: As mentioned earlier, the events of the folktale revolve around the eloquence of Aicha, the carpenter's daughter, and her witty plans. This is significantly illustrated through the retort between Aicha and the sultan. Both characters respond to each other by means of commenting on their personal traits, manners, and behavior. The retort is usually characterized by rhythm. Lebbady recreates the musicality of the two characters' retort by means of two phonological devices, which are alliteration and rhyme. Another instance of retort is the answer of Aisha's three children when they are asked about their mother. This keeps the retort as the core element in the folktale and creates its musicality.

Repetition: This aspect is manifested in two ways within the folktale. The first one is the fact that Aicha and the Sultan's son's retorts dominate within this version. The retorts are placed three times in the three different narrative categories, fulfilling different functions. For example, the first instance of these rhythmic phrases is placed within the initial situation where both characters respond to each other. For instance, the Sultan's son addresses Aicha as follows:

"Lalla Aicha, the carpenter's daughter, Who's so gen'rous to her plants with water," (Lebbady, 2009, p.30). Similarly, Aicha responds to the Sultan as shown in the following example: *"Sidi Mohamed, the son of the king, You Qur'an reader, who knows everything,"* (Lebbady, 2009, p.30).

The second instance of repetition is that the retort between the main characters follows a recursive structure. In every encounter of the main characters, they start with a verbatim repetition of their previous retort as a prelude to the new one.

Dialogue Instances: There are three dialogue instances within the folktale. The first one is the main retort between Aicha and the Sultan's son. This is the core retort within the folktale as it prepares the way for the complicating action, where the Sultan decides to marry Aicha to lock her up in the underground silo. The second one is used to express the astonishment of the Sultan's father at his son's decision to marry Aicha. The third dialogue instance is placed in the ending situation where Aicha's children respond to the servants. Keeping this aspect enables the translated folktale to be performable and catchy in the target language.

Social Performance: Aicha and the Sultan's son perform various speech acts, including declarations, commands, and questions. When both characters engage in a verbal retort, the latter includes declarations such as *"Who's so gen'rous to her plants with water."* (Lebbady, 2009, p.30) and questions like *"Who is the most powerful, man or woman?"* (p.34). These acts imply quick retorts, witness between the two gender roles.

4. Discussion

Interestingly, Lebbady's translation identifies eight cultural aspects that get the receiving audience closer to the practices of Moroccan culture and the activities of Moroccan women. It also situates the folktale in a Moroccan context by means of characters' proper names and the location of events. The strategy used to translate these cultural aspects is foreignization. In Lebbady's version, the instances of the transliterated terms are quite numerous, and they are followed by an explanation. A few examples from Lebbady's translation are the following:

"Aicha was in the habit of growing potted plants in the stah or uppermost terrace of their house in the medina" (Lebbady, 2009, p.29)

"Then by the help of her Dada (nurse or servant) she got herself introduced to the household staff at the king's house." (Lebbady, 2009, p.32).

Other cultural aspects are manifested through the acts of characters, as is the case with the dimension of femininity, which is demonstrated through the cunning acts of Aicha. Lebbady greatly depends on the transliteration of the cultural terms. Yet, her translation of the cultural aspects does not interrupt the reading process by including footnotes, as she includes twelve transliterated terms along with their English translations or explanations within the folktale. Consequently, Lebbady's translation depends greatly on foreignizing the folktale through highlighting different cultural practices and values of the source culture.

Lebbady not only highlights the cultural aspects but also recreates the experience of Moroccan storytelling as she marks the orality of the folktale by recreating rhythmic opening and closing formulae in the target language. The opening and closing formulae are significant elements in Moroccan orality. The storyteller starts with the opening formulae to catch the listener's attention that the story is about to be told. They usually consist of invocations and the prophet's blessings. The closing formula indicates the end of the story. Lebbady culturally adapts these opening and closing formulae by minimizing the cultural aspects that are usually included in these formulae while keeping their structure and rhyme. Additionally, the retort between the main characters and the dialogue instances render the translated folktale performable in the target language.

Interestingly, Lebbady focuses on highlighting the cultural dimensions of Moroccan culture. She opted for foreignization to get the receiving audience to explore the source culture. Additionally, she tends to add the performative aspects, including the opening and closing formulae, the triadic repetition of the retort between Aicha and the Sultan, and the dialogue instances between characters to transmit the experience of storytelling. The preservation of these two dimensions, in Lebbady's translation, goes beyond documenting folktales but successfully contributes to recreating and intensifying orality within them.

6. Conclusion

The present article shows how the cultural and performative aspects are translated in *"Aisha the Carpenter's Daughter,"* which is translated into English by Hasna Lebbady. The analysis demonstrates that the translator opts for foreignization to shed light on the Moroccan cultural aspects and to reformulate the performative aspects, like the opening and closing formulae. The findings of the present article reinforce the idea that the combination and preservation of the cultural and performative aspects when translating folktales enable the latter to be lively and performable in the target language.

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