

Moroccan Folktales Translated into English: A Bibliographical Article

الحكايات الشعبية المغربية المترجمة إلى اللغة الإنجليزية: مقال ببليوغرافي

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Abstract

Translators and researchers tend to document and translate different oral genres, namely, folktales. The present bibliographical article describes eighteen works that are devoted to translating Moroccan folktales into English by Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators. Following the chronological order of these translations, the article aims to provide researchers with an overview of these works by focusing on folktale types, the collection process, and the translation approaches adopted in each work. The article demonstrates that both Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators aim to record Moroccan orality in English and provide valuable material for academic researchers to investigate the translation of orality.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan folktales; translation; orality; cultural heritage; linguistic heritage.

Introduction

Orality refers to the verbal culture that has never been written down. It is made up of all forms which are orally produced, i.e., produced by word of mouth, including ritual texts, proverbs, epic poems, curative chants, folk tales, creation tales, spells, legends, songs, myths, riddles, tongue twisters (World Oral Literature Project, 2011). Joshi, (2018) and Jacobsen, (2017) identify orality as an archive of collective consciousness of oral societies, as it reflects their cultural practices and values. Bandia, (2015) claims that the concept of orality varies across research areas. For example, anthropologists refer to orality as a means through which oral societies express themselves, whereas colonialists and Christians tend to frame orality to understand the mindset of oral societies for religious and civilization reasons (p. 125). In addition, Soukup, (2007) and Mirdha (2021) claim that written literature is a continuation of orality, as all the oral aspects can be identified through written literature, as Devy (2012) states that "Every written piece of literature contains numerous layers of orality" (as cited in Mirdha, 2021). Tsaku, (2017) reinforces this idea through the case study of the Eggon storytelling traditions that are shifted from verbal performances to radios and television, which is secondary orality.

There are different typologies of orality. For example, Lwin (2019) identifies three main narrative genres, which are myths, legends, and folktales (p.1). Nnyagu, (2017) categorizes orality into four main categories, which are folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, songs, and riddles. As for Moroccan orality, Kossmann (2000) mentions four genres, which are jokes or anecdotes, fables, legends, and fairy tales. Lwin, (2019) defines folktales as unwritten traditional narratives that are verbally transmitted (p.1). Folktales play an immense role in enriching the imagination of children and enabling them to understand their culture (Korn-Bursztyn, 1997). Solovyeva, (2015) indicates that folktales are characterized by the opening and closing formulae, parallelism, repetition of events and actions, etc. In addition, Sadiqi, (2014) claims that folktales are featured by varied themes and subplots as well as their narrative structure, which consists of beginning, chained plots,

and ending. Somoff, (2016) claims that the narrative structure of folktales marks their oral source. Interestingly, Dogra, (2017) and Chamalah, (2019) claim that folktales' narrative structure adheres to the thirty-one narrative functions set by Propp, (1968) morphology of folktales. Similarly, Lwin, (2009) and Gervás, (2013) claim that the Proppian narrative functions are inclusive and universal as they help researchers to investigate the different aspects of folktales and mark their orality.

Havemose, (2024) states that the different oral genres shall be documented through different media. Translation is a significant measure to document orality. Mirdha (2021) states that translators are cultural cosmopolitans who move texts from one language to another and from one culture to another. Here, the researcher highlights the role of translation in empowering orality to be aligned with mainstream cultures. In other words, translators globalize orality from one language to the most prestigious languages and from one culture to different cultures to realize a sense of belonging and relevance. This is reinforced by Varma, (2021) as the researcher claims that the transmission and dynamicity of orality depend on and necessitate an act of translation since the importance of orality, being a key corpus of cultural aspects and references associated with a certain community, is equal to the importance of its translation for culture formation (p.54). Furthermore, Haring, (2012) also claims that translation is a key tool to enhance the hegemonic consciousness (p.10).

Academics, translators, and researchers shed light on orality, which marks both the language and culture of various societies. Folktales, as one genre of orality, are valuable material to be explored by researchers and translators to highlight the cultural and linguistic aspects. Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators and researchers tend to translate Moroccan folktales into English. This article compiles eighteen works that document Moroccan folktales in English. This bibliographical article aims to provide researchers with an overview of these works to facilitate their exploration for future research on translating orality.

Methods

Only published books on Moroccan folktales translated into English are set as the primary data for this bibliographical article. The books were searched through physical and online searches, including online platforms, the faculty library, and local bookstores. The time range of the selected books extends from 1927 to 2025, allowing for the inclusion of both the early and contemporary works. The selection of works included in the present article is based on two major factors. The first one is limiting the works that solely focus on Moroccan folktales, as one genre of Moroccan orality. The target language is the second factor adopted. This article highlights the English translations of Moroccan folktales by Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators. Therefore, based on these two factors, eighteen books are selected. These books are listed chronologically and described in terms of the folktale types, the collection process, and the translation approaches.

Result and Discussion

Moroccan Folktales Translated into English

The Young Wives' Tales and Tales of Fez by E. Powys Mathers, (1927)

Edward Powys Mathers is an English poet and translator. In the introductory note, Mathers (1927) mentioned that tales of Fez are folktales that are privately told in the household. Mohamed Fassi collected ten folktales from his grandmother and translated them into French in collaboration with Emil Dermenghem. Mathers, (1927) translates these ten folktales into English, which were edited by Khalid Bekkaoui, Jilali El Koudia, and Abdellatif Khayati in 2007. This edited version is going to be described later in this article. Mathers (1927) tends to highlight different cultural aspects of Moroccan culture and intensify their orality by keeping folk songs embedded in folktales and some closing formulae. This enables the receiving audience to explore the different Moroccan cultural aspects.

Tales and Legends of Morocco by Elisa Chimenti and translated by Arnon Benamy (1965)

Elisa Chimenti is an Italian author and translator. Her book consists of forty-seven folktales and legends. Chimenti, (1965) claims that the compilation of folktales is done in Tangier. She describes that this collection of tales and legends is divided into five main groups. The first group includes legends from the oldest antiquities that existed before Islam, such as Hindu and Greco-Roman polytheisms. The second group is Moroccan legends from Islamic origin. The third group, which is a subpart of Moroccan legends, is Sephardic, referring to the Spanish-Jewish community. The latter comes up with rich and varied tales. The fourth part is folktales that came before Islam and are influenced by Christianity. The fifth group consists of naïve fables that deal with sacred animals and magic plants. The translator opts for transliteration for the cultural terms and includes a glossary. This implies adopting the foreignization strategy to keep the authenticity of Moroccan culture.

Tales of Joujouka by Mohamed Hamri, (1975)

Mohamed Hamri is a Moroccan painter and storyteller. The work is entitled Tales of Joujouka, as the latter refers to a Moroccan village in the Rif mountains. Blanca Hamri documents these folktales that are narrated by Mohamed Hamri, who cannot read or write. There are ten folktales included in this work. Each folktale is accompanied by a different painting by Mohamed Hamri. Blanca Hamri describes the rewriting process of these folktales as the following: "Hamri could neither read nor write, but as a dynamic raconteur, he would tell me stories in a combination of the many languages he knew_ sometimes all in a single sentence" (Hamri, 1975, p.10). The translator exposes the target audience to fifteen cultural terms. The latter are explained in English in the included glossary. This reflects the translator's translation decision in marking the cultural aspects of the source culture.

Moroccan Folktales by Jilali EL Koudia and Roger Allen (2003)

Jilali El Koudia is a Moroccan author, translator, and critic. Roger Allen is an English translator and scholar of Arabic literature. In 2003, both translators recorded a collection of Moroccan folktales in their work, Moroccan Folktales. The latter consists of thirty-one folktales. There is a wide variety of folktales in this work, namely animal folktales, ordinary folktales, jokes and anecdotes, and formula tales. As for the collection and the translation process of these folktales, El Koudia explains that the collection was mainly from female narrators, namely the author's mother. Other folktales are collected from different

Moroccan cities, namely Taza, Fez, Marrakech, Tahnaout, and Tetuan. El Koudia mentions that the translation process involves a mere rebuilding of the narrative plots as well as their recontextualization in favor of reducing redundancy and repetition of the oral version of these folktales. In addition, the translated folktales by El Koudia are followed by a final revision done by Roger Allen, who tries to make these folktales accessible to the English-speaking audience.

Arab Folktales by Inea Bushnaq, (1986)

Inea Boushnaq is a Palestinian author and translator. She collects and translates 125 folktales from different Arab countries, namely Palestine, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Oman, and Morocco. There are twelve Moroccan folktales included in the Boushnaq collection. The author divides the collected Arab folktales into six main categories which are "Tales told in houses made of hair: Beduin tales", "Djinn, ghouls, and afreets: tales of magic and the supernatural", "Magical marriages and mismatches: more tales of the supernatural", "Beasts that roam the Earth and birds that fly with wings: animal tales", "Famous fools and rascals: stories of Djuha and his kind", "Good men and golden words: religious tales and moral instructions", and "Wily women and clever men: tales of wit and wisdom".

The author includes a glossary in which she explains different Arabic cultural terms and tackles different religious and cultural aspects in the introductory notes of the book, including rituals and practices of the different Arab countries whose folktales are included in the work. Boushnaq (1986) aims to push the receiving audience to explore and find out about Moroccan culture through folktales.

Tales of Fez translated by E. Powys Mathers (2007)

E. Powys Mathers (2007) translates nine folktales from French into English. In the introductory notes of the book, Mathers (2007) explains that the anthropologist Emile Dermenghem and Mohamed El Fassi took records of these folktales orally from El Fassi's grandmother. These folktales are mostly popular in Fez. Mathers (2007) describes the translation process as he claims keeping the proper names and local names of places as they are mentioned in the French version.

Moving to the editors' notes, the editors claim that their changes and interventions in Mathers's translation of folktales are based on the French version of folktales in El Fassi's book, "Contes Fassis". In addition, one folktale, "Sayings and Adventures of the Sultan's Dada," is omitted from Mathers's first version by the editors since it is not included in Contes Fassis, nor is it in harmony with Moroccan orality, namely Fassi folktales. Furthermore, one of the editors, Jilali El Koudia, rewrites or finishes the missing section of the last folktale, "The Kaftan of Love Spotted with Passion".

Feminist Traditions in Andalusi-Moroccan Oral Narratives by Hasna Lebaddy (2009)

Hasna Lebaddy is a Moroccan translator and researcher. In her book, *Feminist Traditions in Andalusi-Moroccan Oral Narratives*, she translates seven folktales. The events of these seven folktales are mainly about the eloquence of the main female characters. Lebaddy, (2009) places these translated folktales in forms of chapters, as each folktale is accompanied by an extensive commentary on its cultural and historical dimensions. The seven folktales are preceded by an extensive introduction where she tackles different aspects related to retelling folktales and postcolonial feminism. The translator explains that the

recording of folktales was in the Moroccan vernacular in the Tetouani accent.

Therefore, Lebaddy tends to keep some Moroccan cultural terms transliterated in the English version to implement the Moroccan 'flavor' in the translated folktales. She also tends to keep an explanation of these Moroccan cultural terms in English in the notes section.

The Last Storytellers: Tales from The Heart of Morocco by Richard Hamilton, (2011)

Richard Hamilton is a British author and broadcast journalist. In 2011, he published his work entitled "The Last Storyteller: Tales from the heart of Morocco", in which he introduces thirty-nine Moroccan folktales translated into English. Hamilton (2011) collects, records, transcribes, and translates these folktales from five storytellers in Marrakesh: Moulay Mohamed El Jabri, Ahmed Timicha, Mohamed Bariz, Mustapha Khal Layoun, and Abderrahim El Makkouri. Hamilton (2011) implements this translation process of Moroccan folktales with the assistance of an official tour guide, Ahmed Tija, who accompanies him when recording and transcribing folktales from the aforementioned storytellers. The book is divided according to the number of folktales, as each section includes a Moroccan folktale with its storyteller's full name.

Kan Ya Ma Kan: Moroccan Folk Tales on Women by Malika EL Ouali Alami (2013)

Alami, (2013) is a Moroccan translator and researcher. She translates eleven Moroccan folktales into English. The events of these translated folktales revolve around eloquent female characters. The translator claims that she renders these oral folktales by adopting communicative translation, aiming to convey the essence of these folktales, focusing on transmitting their oral and performative aspects, namely songs, as well as the opening and closing formulae. Alami (2013) includes the Moroccan recorded version of the translated folktales, which will help academic researchers and translators conducting a contrastive analysis of both versions.

Moroccan Tales from Fez by Jilali El Koudia, (2014)

This work was published in 2014. It contains five folktales translated by Jilali El Koudia. These five folktales were first collected and translated into French by Mohamed El Fassi and Emile Dermenghem in 1927. In fact, both translators, El Fassi and Dermenghem, collect and translate fifteen Moroccan folktales into French. Five of these folktales are translated into English by El Koudia, and the remaining folktales were already translated by E. Powys Mathers. El Koudia aims to get the receiving audience closer to the source culture. The translator highlights the Moroccan cultural practices and values, transliterates the cultural terms, and establishes the setting and characters by means of Moroccan cities and names.

Morocco's Folktales by Rachida Rhazali (2014)

Rachida Rhazali is a Moroccan translator and lecturer. Her work, *Morocco's Folktales*, contains thirty-four folktales. Rhazali (2014) collects Moroccan folktales from middle-aged and elderly women in different Moroccan cities and translates them into English. Rhazali, (2014) categorizes these thirty-four folktales into five categories, which are talking beast stories, realistic stories, romances, tales of magic, and cumulative tales. The translator claims that the process of translating these folktales involves omitting repetition and wordiness as well as maintaining a simple language to be accessible for the English-speaking audience.

Storytelling in Chefchaouen, Northern Morocco: An Annotated Study of Oral Performances with Transliterations and Translations by Aicha Rahmouni (2014)

Aicha Rahmouni is a Moroccan translator and a researcher. Rahmouni (2014) records from a male storyteller and a female storyteller. She mentions that female storytellers are more linguistically and culturally associated with oral literature. Rahmouni's work consists of thirteen folktales and two poems recorded from the male storyteller. From the female storyteller, the translator records nine folktales, four lullabies, and one song. The translator provides a phonemic transcription of the recorded folktales, followed by the English translation. Concerning the translation process, the translator explains that she renders these recorded oral genres without any creations or reworkings. Instead, she provides extensive explanations and clarifications related to the linguistic and cultural aspects.

Stories from Marrakech by Anissa K'hal Laayoun (2019)

Anissa K'hal Laayoun is a Moroccan poetess, author, and translator. In this work, K'hal Laayoun (2019) compiles different folktales and anecdotes, namely the popular ones in Marrakech. This book is divided into three main parts. In the first, "In The Company of the Pasha, Hakem, Cadi, Oustad," she includes forty anecdotes in which the Pasha or the Cadi, the Hakem, is the main character. The second part is entitled Tales from Marrakech. This part includes

seven folktales. The Adventures of Aouisha is the third part of K'hal Laayoun's book. It includes eighteen short folktales that revolve around the witty plans of Aouisha in tricking and outsmarting men. K'hal Laayoun (2019) strongly opted for foreignizing the translation of these folktales as she aims to drag the receiving audience toward exploring the Moroccan cultural aspects.

Jewish Folktales from Morocco: Tales of Seha the Sage and Seha the Clown (Sephardic and Mizrahi Studies) by Marc Eliany, (2021)

Marc Eliany is a Jewish author. Eliany (2021) brings together a set of folktales rooted in Moroccan Jewish orality. These folktales revolve around Seha, a character who represents both wisdom and folly. The book is divided into two parts. The first is entitled Tales of Seha the sage, which includes twenty-eight folktales. The latter are accompanied by comments which highlight different themes like education, modesty, sainthood, etc. The second part is entitled Tales of Seha the Clown, in which there are sixteen folktales. Through translating these folktales, Eliany (2021) tends to call the attention of the target audience to the different Moroccan Jewish values and practices.

Tales from Morocco by Naceur Jabouja Ulmer (2023)
Naceur Jabouja Ulmer is a Moroccan author and researcher. In his book, Tales from Morocco, he translates nine Moroccan folktales into English. The type of folktales included are classic folktales, supernatural folktales, and trickster folktales. Through the introduction of his book, the

Table 1. Summary Table of Books on Moroccan Folktales Translated into English

Number	Book Title	Translator(s)	Year
1	The Young Wives' Tales and Tales of Fez	E. Powys Mathers	1927
2	Tales and Legends of Morocco	Elisa Chimenti and Arnon Benamy	1965
3	Tales of Joujouka	Mohamed Hamri	1975
4	Moroccan Folktales	Jilali EL Koudia and Roger Allen	2003
5	Arab Folktales	Inea Boushnaq	1986
6	Tales of Fez	E. Powys Mathers	2007
7	Feminist Traditions in Andalus-Moroccan Oral Narratives	Hasna Lebaddy	2009
8	The Last Storytellers: Tales from The Heart of Morocco	Richard Hamilton	2011
9	Kan Ya Ma Kan: Moroccan Folk Tales on Women	Malika El Ouali Alami	2013
10	Moroccan Tales from Fez	Jilali El Koudia	2014
11	Morocco's Folktales	Rachida Rhazali	2014
12	Storytelling in Chefchaouen, Northern Morocco: An Annotated Study of Oral Performances with Transliterations and Translations	Aicha Rahmouni	2014
13	Stories from Marrakech	Anissa K'hal Laayoun	2019
14	Jewish Folktales from Morocco: Tales of Seha the Sage and Seha the Clown (Sephardic and Mizrahi Studies)	Marc Eliany	2021
15	Tales from Morocco	Naceur Jabouja Ulmer	2023
16	Hajeetek Majeetek: My Grandmother's North African Folktales	Sara Filali	2023
17	Short Bedtime Stories: The Clever HDIDANE and The Sultan's Challenge: Moroccan Folktales, Cultural Stories for Kids	Jhabli Mohammed	2025
18	Atlas Whispers Moroccan Wisdom Tales: From Grandmother Fatima for Young Hearts	Fatima Telfan	2025

author highlights how this oral genre highlights the cultural aspects of Moroccan culture. Here, the translator implies that rewriting folktales shall be in favor of shedding light on the cultural aspects of the source culture.

Hajeetek Majeetek: My Grandmother's North African Folktales by Sara Filali (2023)

Sara Filali is a Moroccan American author and artist. Her work consists of seven folktales. Filali (2023) collects these folktales from her grandmother and translates them into English. She claims that the translation process is a mere adaptation to make these folktales accessible to the target audience. Filali (2023) opts for foreignization. A glossary of Moroccan terms is included.

Short Bedtime Stories: The Clever HDIDANE and The Sultan's Challenge: Moroccan Folktales, Cultural Stories for Kids by Jhabli Mohammed (2025)

Mohammed Jhabli is a Moroccan author. Jhabli's work includes one Moroccan folktale that revolves around Hdidan, a Moroccan trickster character who is known for his cleverness. The character always finds himself in the middle of tasks and problems, which he solves with his wit. The book is mainly devoted to young readers. Therefore, Jhabli (2025) adapted these folktales from Moroccan orality to fit the young readers.

Atlas Whispers Moroccan Wisdom Tales: From Grandmother Fatima for Young Hearts by Fatima Telfan (2025)

Fatima Telfan is a Moroccan author and social and educational activist. In her work, Telfan (2025) introduces Moroccan folktales that highlight moral lessons and cultural aspects central to Moroccan culture. This work offers young readers access to explore the different Moroccan cultural aspects. Telfan (2025) tends to expose young readers to the values and practices embedded in Moroccan culture.

Moving forward, the following table summarizes the eighteen works devoted to translating Moroccan folktales into English. (See [Table 1](#))

The description and analysis of the aforementioned works demonstrate that translators and researchers show a great interest in documenting Moroccan orality by means of translation. It is worth noting that Moroccan translators are more numerous than non-Moroccan translators, as shown in the results section. This implies the goal of Moroccan translators in enhancing the Moroccan cultural aspects and getting the receiving audience closer to the source culture.

When translating Moroccan folktales into English, translators take two main directions. The first is opting for foreignization as a translation strategy. Here, translators rework and expand the narrative plot of the folktales to include different cultural aspects. Additionally, translators tend to transliterate cultural terms. This translation strategy

is mostly adopted by Moroccan translators. For example, El Koudia, (2014) and Rahmouni (2014) are among the translators who opt for transliteration and tend to expand the folktale to include as many cultural aspects as possible.

Moreover, the translators include a glossary in which non-English words are explained. The inclusion of a glossary to explain Moroccan cultural terms makes the target readers quite familiar with the source culture, yet this can interrupt the reading process of folktales. Additionally, some Moroccan translators, including Alami (2013) and Lebaddy (2009), aim to intensify the performative and oral aspects within their translation by including folksongs and keeping the Moroccan opening and closing formulae to mark the folktales' orality. The second direction is domestication, which is mostly adopted by non-Moroccan translators who prioritize introducing well-narrated folktales by rewriting their plots and minimizing cultural aspects that may block the narrative flow of events for the receiving audience.

Conclusion

To conclude, this bibliographical article surveys eighteen works on translating Moroccan folktales into English by Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators. The article shows that both Moroccan and non-Moroccan translators render a wide range of folktale types, including marvelous folktales, wisdom folktales, and animal folktales. The examination of these works also shows that translators take two main paths, which are foreignization and domestication. The former is widely used by Moroccan translators who tend to enhance different aspects of the source culture. The latter is mainly opted for non-Moroccan translators, prioritizing to introduce a good and performable story. This bibliographical article is a significant foundation for researchers to explore research issues related to translating orality.

Author contributions

Both authors contributed to the development of this bibliographical article. The first author collected, selected, and described the corpus of eighteen works. The second author provided academic supervision, contributed to the conceptualization of the bibliographical article, and reviewed and revised the article. Both authors read and approved the final version.

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