



**TRANSLATING “AICHA RMADA”  
INTO ENGLISH: UNIVERSALITY AND CULTURAL  
SPECIFICITY IN THE MOROCCAN VARIANT OF “CINDERELLA”**

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**Abstract:**

The collective consciousness of societies, and the similarity of external factors such as religion and language, justify the universality of folktales. Yet the cultural and social background of each social group leads to the emergence of a variant of the folktale. When documenting folktales as a genre of orality, translators and researchers encounter different variants of the same folktale, as is the case with the folktale of “Cinderella”. The present article investigates the English translation of the Moroccan variant of Cinderella’s story, “Aicha Rmada”, by Richard Hamilton. This article sheds light on the translation procedures adopted to transmit the universality and cultural specificity of the translated folktale. Thus, a narrative and cultural analysis will be conducted under the Propp morphology of folktales and the cultural iceberg theory. The findings reveal that addition and elaboration are two translation procedures used in Hamilton’s translation to rewrite and familiarize the folktale’s plot for the receiving audience, and to highlight Moroccan cultural aspects.

**Keywords:** orality, folktale, culture, translation, “Cinderella”

**1. Introduction**

Hamilton (2011) claims that mankind has been eager to listen and read stories since their existence. As the exact date of the beginning of storytelling is not specified, the author traces its origins to the Lascaux caves in France, where paintings date back thousands of years. These paintings tell stories, as they can serve as proof or a record of the first storytelling tradition. Stories or the tradition of storytelling in general is meant to be a means to condense and transmit knowledge for oral people. In addition, folktales are told to entertain people of all

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categories since it is through stories that men and women escape from reality, concluding it with a happy ending or explaining different social, cultural, and religious phenomena (p.2). According to Thompson (1977), the term folktale refers to both oral and written narratives which are transmitted from one generation to another (pp. 1-4), whereas Lwin (2019) defines folktales as traditional narratives which are not committed to writing and are verbally transmitted (p.1).

The role of storytelling or folktales is explained by different researchers. EL Koudia and Allen (2003) highlight the role of folktales in Moroccan society in four main folds, which are entertainment, religious, didactic, and moral instructions. In addition, El Ouali Alami (2013) and El Koudia and Allen (2003) claim that folktales reflect the daily life of ordinary people from higher to lower social classes. Women are usually occupied with raising their children by teaching them the religious traditions, rituals, cultural, and social values. The thread between all these tasks is storytelling, as these religious, moral, and social values are indirectly transmitted through telling stories. Moreover, Sadiqi (2014) and Joshi (2018) state that folktales are powerful means to reinforce the relationship between individuals and communities. Storytelling holds up family relations, especially between grandmothers and their grandchildren, as grandmothers usually strengthen their status by maintaining suspense in each part of the story and keep their grandchildren eager for the story time (Sadiqi, 2014, p. 11).

Lwin (2019) lists three main features of folktales. Firstly, characters and events are fictitious. Secondly, folktales are mainly featured with their literary creativity. The author claims that this literary creativity is realized using different linguistic forms, which renders the folktale rhythmic. Lwin (2019) gives an example of how the onomatopoeic sounds and parallel grammatical structure create rhythm within the folktale. The third characteristic is the cultural load or heritage that is embedded within folktales. Furthermore, folktales are characterized by two aspects that are common to all folktales around the globe. The first is that folktales often discuss universal themes such as jealousy, greed, and love. The second is narrative structure. Lwin (2010) demonstrates the latter through conducting a contrastive analysis of folktales from different cultural backgrounds. The author shows that most folktales share similar narrative structural patterns, which are reward/ punishment, where the villain is punished for their evil acts and the hero is rewarded for their good intentions. The next pattern is interdiction/ violation, where the violation of interdiction disorders the equilibrium of events and prepares the way to the complicating actions. Trickery is another common pattern where the characters deceive or trick each other (Lwin, 2010, as cited in Lwin, 2019, pp. 3-4)

One can always wonder about the similarity of oral materials, be they tales, songs, poems, or even proverbs. Propp (1968) approaches this point from a social and historical background, saying that the similarity of the oral output and productions of oral societies lies in the fact that the social rituals and institutions, the collective mindset and thoughts, and the external factors such as language and religion all contribute to coming up with nearly identical orality (p. 7). Additionally, there are two factors that can explain the similarity of orality across different countries. The first one is dynamism. Orality is transmitted from one person to

another, as every listener is a potential performer or narrator. The second factor is the fact that narrators themselves play an immense role in adapting orality, be it a folktale, for example, according to their cultural and social background. This justifies finding the same folktale with slight differences at the level of names, places, and flow of events. In the introduction of the *Confluence* book, Richard Hamilton explains the sameness of folktales around the world. He states that folktales also travel from one person to another and from one country to another. He bases his idea on a psychological and ethnographical background, mainly the theory of collective consciousness, as Richard Hamilton claims that humans think similarly (Hudson Mackay, 2018).

*Cinderella* is a global folktale across cultures. Oral societies have their variant of Cinderella's story, which aligns with their cultural and social backgrounds. In the Moroccan context, translators surely encounter the Moroccan variant of Cinderella's story. Here, the act of translation necessitates rendering the universality of the story and the cultural "flavor" that distinguishes the folktale as a Moroccan variant of "*Cinderella*". The present article will investigate the translation procedures adopted by Richard Hamilton to translate "*Aicha Rmada*," which is a Moroccan variant of Cinderella's story, into English.

## 2. Literature Review

Tymoczko (1995) claims that cognitive sciences suggest that introducing new information should be presented and assimilated by means of familiar patterns to the target readers. A more comprehensive description is that each telling or retelling is metonymic; that is to say, each time a story is told or retold, it rings a bell in the mind of the target audience of the previous telling of the same tale (Foley (1987) as cited in Tymoczko (1995)). The metonymic feature of retelling and rewriting reinforces and enhances the cultural continuity. When rewriting orality, we come up with different versions of the same story but with distinctive contexts. Therefore, the metonymic aspect of retelling is enhanced by translating orality using an adaptation strategy. Translators excel in rewriting the source text and making the metonymic aspects of the source text and culture more transparent for the receiving audience to make it more familiar and domesticated. Tymoczko (2020) claims that translators shall recreate a similar experience of fairy tales for the receiving audience and enhance the cultural aspects of the source culture to introduce a new cultural setting for the receiving audience.

Korn-Bursztyn (1997) claims that folktales reflect the cultural beliefs and practices of societies. Therefore, folktales will be distant and different for culturally different receiving audiences if there is no shared meaning between cultures. Therefore, folktales should be reexamined to narrow the gap between the source and target cultures. The scholar adds that a single story, when transmitted across cultures, is perceived and understood differently according to the cultural background of the receiving audience. Additionally, when stories are brought to a different cultural context, the storyteller, the story, and the audience participate in reshaping another layer of meaning of the transmitted folktale.

Ettehad (2021) investigates how culture-specific items are translated into Farisi in the Farisi translation of "*Cinderella*", in light of Peter Newmark's procedures for translating

culture-specific items. Ettahad (2021) claims that translators use different translation procedures, such as addition, to mark the target language's culture. For example, the phrase "Once upon a time" is rendered as "there was no one but God," which is a culturally common phrase in the Farisi oral traditions. Deletion and cultural equivalence are also used to narrow the cultural gap between the source and target cultures.

Dutheil de la Rochère (2013) conducts a comparative analysis of two translations of Cinderella's story. The first was translated by Robert Samber in 1729, and the second was translated by Angela Carter in 1977. The researcher claims that the translation of the tale of "Cinderella" goes in line with the cultural and commercial demands of each century. Here, translation is perceived as a process of transformation. Dutheil de la Rochère (2013) demonstrates each translation's characteristics as well as the elements highlighted in both translations. Samber's translation is a word-for-word translation; it reflects England's values, whereas Carter's consists of simple language and updates cultural references like feminist critique.

The aforementioned studies indicate that translating folktales or any other oral genres should prioritize the receiving audience. The researchers agree that translators should recreate shared space between the source and target cultures. In other words, translators create a similar experience of fairy tales for the receiving audience while maintaining the source culture's trace within the translation.

### 3. Material and Methods

#### 3.1. Data collection

"Aicha Rmada" is a Moroccan variant<sup>ii</sup> of the "Cinderella" story. The latter is one of the most popular folktales around the world. The skeleton of the story revolves around a girl who is always mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. The latter forbade her from attending the prince's party. With the help of different magical agents, the girl manages to go to the prince's palace, where she left her marvelous slipper. The story ends with the marriage of the girl and the prince. The Moroccan variant itself has different versions. Keeping the same key events, translators come up with different initial situations and descriptions of characters. Therefore, there are five versions of "Aicha Rmada", which are translated into English by either a Moroccan or a non-Moroccan translator.

The five Moroccan versions of Cinderella's story can be categorized into two groups when considering the sequence of events. First, there are two versions that recount the story of Aicha Rmada, whose mother was turned into a cow by a wicked co-wife. The latter mistreats Aicha and forbids her from attending the Sultan's ceremony. Aicha's mother in these versions serves as a helper in the story as she helps and rescues her daughter from the plotting of her stepmother. Second, three versions narrate the story of Aicha Rmada, who lives with her father and stepmother. The latter mistreats her. Aicha, in these versions, is rescued from

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<sup>ii</sup> For a folklorist, a version refers to a retelling of a folktale, whereas a variant is associated with a folktale that only shares the most prominent narrative elements with other folktales and significantly differs in terms of the cultural aspects and plot development.

the mistreatment of her stepmother through the help of a magical agent or a donor, be it a fish or a mermaid. Therefore, it is found that "*Aicha Rmada*" translated by Richard Hamilton (2011), "*Nunja and The White Dove*" translated by El Koudia and Roger Allen (2003), represent the first version of Aicha Rmada's story, whereas "*Aicha Cinderella*" translated by Aicha Rahmouni (2014), "*Kchada Rmada*" translated by Rachida Rhazali (2014), and "*The Fisherman*" translated by Jilali El Koudia and Roger Allen (2003) illustrate the second version of the story. Jilali el Koudia and Roger Allen (2003) include both versions of *Aicha Rmada* in their collection of Moroccan folktales.

This article investigates Hamilton's translation of the Moroccan variant of Cinderella's story, "*Aicha Rmada*". As a foreign translator, Hamilton is already familiar with the common "*Cinderella*" narratives for the English-speaking audience. This familiarity will enable the translator to be positioned between the universality of the folktale and the Moroccan cultural aspects embedded in its variant. By choosing Hamilton's translation, this article tracks the translation procedures adopted to manage the universality of the plot and Moroccan cultural aspects through a narrative and cultural analysis.

### **3.2. Data analysis**

After a brief description of the available versions of Cinderella's story, Hamilton's version will be studied in terms of the narrative functions and the cultural aspects. In light of Propp's morphology of folktales and the cultural iceberg theory.

#### **3.2.1. Propp's Morphology of Folktales**

For Propp (1968), the classification of folktales should be based on the actions and functions of characters as they are limited and fixed. The scholar extracts thirty-one functions such as absentation, interdiction, violation of the interdiction, ... and seven-character roles which are the princess, hero, donor, helper, false hero, dispatcher, and villain. Propp's morphology of folktales is useful to track the sequence of events and characters' roles in Hamilton's translation, and investigate the reworking done in terms of the narrative level in the translation process.

#### **3.2.2. The Cultural Iceberg Theory**

The Cultural Iceberg theory by Edward T. Hall is a model of culture that compares culture to an iceberg. The visible part of the iceberg refers to the explicit elements of culture, whereas the invisible part of the iceberg represents the hidden or implicit cultural elements (Katan, 2014, pp. 29-30). In the present article, the cultural aspects highlighted in Hamilton's translation will be identified in the light of the cultural iceberg theory.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Folktale Synopsis

This folktale narrates the story of a girl named Aicha who was mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. With the help of her mother, Aicha could attend the prince’s party. The latter marries Aicha when finding her missing slippers.

### 4.2. Narrative Analysis

The table (see Table 1) shows the narrative functions that shape Hamilton’s version. The latter starts with enumerating and naming the main characters, then describing them by means of their personal and physical traits, either ugly and rude or beautiful and kind. Additionally, the translator highlights the kinship between the two main characters, Aicha and her stepmother. Thus, in the initial situation, the translator draws a vivid picture of the characters involved in the story, their personal and physical description, the relationship between them, and the setting in which the upcoming events will take place. The complicated action comes in the form of different functions performed by the main characters. It starts with the absentation of two wives when going to the river. This function of absentation prepares the way for the act of the villain, where the stepmother turns Aicha’s mother into a cow and mistreats her daughter by assigning difficult tasks. Then, the absentation of the Sultan pushes the stepsister to perform an act of villainy toward Aicha Rmada. The multiple instances of villainous acts are surely liquidated through resolving the difficult task assigned to Aicha by the stepmother. Here, a new character role is introduced in the folktale, namely the helper. The latter, in this version, is the spirit of Aicha’s mother. The folktale ends with the exposure and punishment of the stepmother and stepsister.

**Table 1:** Narrative Functions of “*Aicha Rmada*” Translated by Richard Hamilton

Narrative Functions	“ <i>Aicha Rmada</i> ”
<b>Initial situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zohra and Khadija are two cowives. The first is ugly and sorceress and the second is beautiful and kind.</li> <li>- Each of the cowives gives birth to a daughter.</li> </ul>
<b>Complicating action:</b> <b>Absentation</b> <b>Villainy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The two cowives went to the river to wash their clothes.</li> <li>- Zohra, the sorceress, turns Khadija, the second wife, into a cow. Then she slaughters it.</li> <li>- The stepmother starts to mistreat Aicha, Khadija’s daughter.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack</b> <b>Difficult task</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Sultan organizes a party to look for a bride.</li> <li>- To forbid her from attending the Sultan’s party, the stepmother asks Aicha Rmada to sort out different grains.</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution</b> <b>Lack</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aicha Rmada went to the party with the help of her mother in her human form and flocks of birds.</li> </ul>
<b>The initial misfortune is liquidated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Sultan looks for the girl to whom the slipper belongs.</li> <li>- The second pair of the slipper is found, and the Sultan got married to Aicha Rmada.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Complicating action:</b></p> <p><b>Absentation</b></p> <p><b>Trickery</b></p> <p><b>Villainy</b></p> <p><b>Resolution</b></p> <p><b>Hero’s recognition</b></p> <p><b>Exposure and punishment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Sultan went to conduct a war.</li> <li>- The stepsister asks Aicha about the location of the well.</li> <li>- The stepsister pushes Aicha Rmada into the deep well.</li> <li>- After the Sultan’s return, he rescues his wife.</li> <li>- Aicha recounts the whole story to her husband.</li> <li>- The wicked stepsister is killed, and the stepmother is dead from anger after she realizes that she ate her daughter.</li> </ul>
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### 4.3. Cultural Aspects

Hamilton sets the Moroccan context of the folktale through three main elements, which are the **characters’ proper names, the location of events, and governing roles**. In this version, the main characters, mainly the hero and the villain, are named Khadija, Zohra, and Aicha. In addition to the use of **Moroccan proper names**, the translator uses a Moroccan nickname of Aicha, which is Rmada. It is explained within the folktale as “*to be covered in ash*” (Hamilton, 2011, p.186). The events take place in two main **locations**, which are Aicha’s house and the royal palace, where different **governing roles** are mentioned, such as the Sultan, the queen, servants, and slaves. This implies the hierarchy existing in the royal place, as well as giving a glance at the historical and social structure in Morocco, where slavery used to exist. **The religious aspect** is woven within the folktale through the practice of ablution. **The climate features** of Morocco are identified when describing how the little pieces of the stepsister’s body dry in the hot Moroccan sun. Furthermore, the search for Aicha Rmada by the Sultan is expanded to highlight the aspect of **Adventure in the Sahara**. The journey of the Sultan to find the missing slipper is described as hard and long in the Sahara to portray the adventurous aspect of Eastern culture. Another aspect is the cruelty of the Sultan through the beheading of the villain.

Moving forward, the findings indicate that at the narrative level, Hamilton reworks the folktale's plot by adding a few elements, such as character portrayals, changes to or additions to the story's setting, and character naming. Additionally, as is demonstrated, Hamilton’s translation adheres to the narrative functions set by Propp. In addition, Hamilton’s translation aligns with the common sequence of events in the “*Cinderella*” story. This enables the translator to evoke the universality of the folktale in favor of the receiving audience.

At the cultural level, Hamilton highlights Moroccan cultural aspects mainly through narrative elements like characters and settings. He also portrays the journey of the sultan to look for the missing shoe as hard in the Sahara. This implies exoticizing the setting of the folktale. Interestingly, through the description of different events, the translator seizes the opportunity to contextualize the events in the Moroccan context, as is the case when emphasizing the uniqueness and strength of the Moroccan sun in drying the little pieces of meat.

Interestingly, Hamilton’s translation balances between the universality of the “*Cinderella*” story and the cultural aspects that differentiate the Moroccan variant of the folktale. The balance is conducted through two main levels in the translation process. The first one is the narrative level. As a foreign translator, Hamilton is quite familiar with the sequence of events in the story of Cinderella. Therefore, the translator uses addition, deletion, and

elaboration to rewrite the folktale, giving the English-speaking audience a familiar experience of fairy tales. The second level is the cultural level. Hamilton keeps the Moroccan 'flavor' in the translated folktale through preserving different cultural aspects, such as Moroccan names and locations.

## 5. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, as a genre of orality, folktales travel from one country to another. The folktale of Cinderella is one of the global folktales across different cultures. The present article shows the translation procedures used by Richard Hamilton when rendering the folktale, "Aicha Rmada," into English. The analysis demonstrates that the translator keeps the universality of the folktale by rewriting the plot and renders the cultural aspects of Moroccan culture by adding different aspects like character names and locations of events. The reworkings in terms of the narrative and cultural levels create the balance between introducing a familiar story to the receiving audience and leading the latter to discover the Moroccan variant of "Cinderella".

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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