

Digital Technology and the Kabyle Folk Tale: Contributions and Exogenous Influences on Amazigh Oral Heritage

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the digital turn has transformed the ways in which oral cultures are produced, circulated, and transmitted. This transformation goes beyond the introduction of a new medium; it represents a significant epistemological and sociocultural shift. Cultures grounded in oral performance and collective memory are increasingly confronted with automated and globalized tools that disrupt traditional mechanisms of transmission. Orality, as described by Walter Ong, constitutes a distinct mode of thought and expression that differs from writing. Today, it is mediated by technologies that record it, disseminate it on a wide scale, and ultimately transform it.

I. Introduction

1. General Context: Digitalization and Oral Literature

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the digital turn has transformed the ways in which oral cultures are produced, circulated, and transmitted. This transformation goes beyond the introduction of a new medium; it represents a significant epistemological and sociocultural shift. Cultures grounded in oral performance and collective memory are increasingly confronted with automated and globalized tools that disrupt traditional mechanisms of transmission. Orality, as described by Walter Ong, constitutes a distinct mode of thought and expression that differs from writing. Today, it is mediated by technologies that record it, disseminate it on a wide scale, and ultimately transform it.

2. The Specificity of Amazigh Culture: Tradition, Transmission, and Variation

In North Africa, particularly in Kabylia, Amazigh literature, once sustained primarily through speech, memory, and communal rituals, is undergoing an unprecedented transformation. Rich in folk tales (timucuha), poems (isefra), and proverbs (inzan), this literary heritage embodies a distinctive identity and worldview. Its transmission has traditionally relied on variation and adaptation to context, with each storyteller serving as a creative link in the chain of collective memory.

The emergence of digital tools—including generative artificial intelligence, collaborative platforms, social networks, specialized websites, and mobile applications—plays a dual role. On the one hand, these tools act as a catalyst for revitalization by opening up new channels of dissemination. On the other hand, they

introduce external influences that may be subtle in some cases and far-reaching in others.

Preserve the Original French Headings More Closely

3. Central Research Problem: Digital Hybridization and External Influences

This dynamic gives rise to a central question: what becomes of ancestral narrative heritage when its production shifts to digital environments governed by globalized logics?

The main issue lies in the hybridization between local cultural continuity and digital transformation. This hybridization invites us to reconsider the place of human beings, the nature of creativity, the role of collective memory, and the mechanisms involved in language preservation. It also raises questions about the future of Amazigh literature: can it modernize without losing its essence? Does digital technology represent a threat, a source of enrichment, or an inevitable form of coexistence?

4. Presentation of the Corpus: Five Kabyle Tales Generated by Artificial Intelligence

This paper addresses the research problem through an original corpus consisting of five Kabyle tales generated by a text-based artificial intelligence system. These texts provide valuable material for examining how automated productions reproduce the structures of traditional tales—such as animal personification, moral instruction, and the wisdom rooted in local culture—while incorporating discursive forms, narrative patterns, and values that may sometimes be foreign to the original cultural heritage.

5. Scientific Objectives and Methodology

The main objective is to identify, through the analysis of this corpus, the contributions, potential deviations, and external influences associated with automated digital production. It also seeks to assess the implications of these transformations for the preservation, standardization, and transmission of Amazigh oral heritage.

Our approach is twofold:

Internal Analysis: A linguistic and narrative examination of the five AI-generated tales, comparing them with the defining characteristics of the classical Kabyle tale, particularly its characters, actantial structure, and moral function.

External Analysis: Mobilization of a theoretical framework derived from postcolonial studies and the sociolinguistics of digital environments in order to interpret the phenomena of cultural hybridization and standardization observed.

II. Theoretical Framework

1. Definition of Amazigh Oral Literature

Amazigh oral literature, and Kabyle folktales in particular, constitute a literary genre with a didactic purpose and rich symbolic content. According to the ethnologist Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, the Kabyle folktale is not merely intended to entertain; rather, it serves as a means of education and the transmission of social norms.

“The moral function of the folktale in the education of children and adolescents is essential. Through an imaginative and memorable form, the folktale conveys the rules of conduct, values, and prohibitions of Kabyle society.” (Lacoste-Dujardin, p. 79)

This literature is distinguished by the predominance of animal personification and by a narrative structure that, while following universal patterns such as those identified by Propp, remains deeply rooted in the local landscape and history. The Kabyle writer and linguist Mouloud Mammeri devoted part of his work to collecting and translating these folktales, emphasizing their role in preserving the language and collective memory.

2. The Digitization of Minority Cultures

The digitization of minority cultures, including Amazigh culture, presents contradictory aspects. On the one hand, it offers unprecedented visibility and accessibility, making it possible to overcome institutional and geographical barriers. On the other hand, it exposes these cultures to forces of cultural leveling and homogenization.

The digital space, dominated by majority languages and cultural frameworks (English, French, and Modern Standard Arabic), imposes its own discursive conventions and narrative patterns, thereby risking the neutralization of morphosyntactic features and the introduction of uncontrolled linguistic borrowings.

3. Theories of Cultural Hybridization (Bhabha and Canclini)

The analysis of literary production through artificial intelligence requires the concept of cultural hybridization, which makes it possible to move beyond the simplistic opposition between tradition and modernity.

The postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha proposes the concept of the third space of enunciation. This “in-between” space is not merely a mixture; rather, it is a site of negotiation and translation where cultural meanings emerge in ambivalent and contestatory forms.

“It is in the third space of enunciation that culture is produced, not as a pure essence or a fixed inheritance, but as a process of translation and negotiation, a site where identities are constructed through ambivalence.”

In our corpus, the third space corresponds to the digital interface (AI), where the Kabyle folktale (tradition) encounters globalized algorithms (modernity).

The resulting hybridization can become a space of resistance and the creation of new forms, but it can also constitute a site where the original cultural authority is challenged.

The anthropologist and sociologist Néstor García Canclini links hybridization to the processes of modernization and globalization. He describes it as a form of “symbolic mixing” that occurs when traditional, modern, and postmodern cultures interact.

“Hybridization is a sociocultural process in which distinct structures or practices, which previously existed separately, combine to generate new structures, objects, and practices.”

Canclini emphasizes that hybridization is not merely a form of banal syncretism, but rather a strategy for “entering and leaving modernity,” enabling cultures to reinvent themselves in response to the shocks of globalization. An examination of AI-generated folktales will make it possible to determine whether this hybridization constitutes a conscious and creative act (a strategy) or merely a deviation resulting from algorithmic homogenization (external influence).

4. Digital Sociolinguistics: Borrowing, Leveling, and Standardization

Digital technologies directly influence language. AI systems trained on very large and imbalanced corpora that favor dominant languages can contribute to linguistic leveling. In the case of Kabyle, this manifests itself through:

- The emergence of Arabized expressions, Gallicisms, and French calques, reflecting both historical and contemporary influences.
- A morphosyntactic neutralization characteristic of AI systems, which tend to select the most frequent forms and those least marked by dialectal features, at the expense of the richness and diversity of spoken language.

5. Identity and Heritage Issues

The ultimate significance of this hybridization lies in its identity-related and heritage dimensions. Oral literature constitutes a cornerstone of Amazigh identity.

The automated production of folktales, if left without proper guidance and supervision, risks causing symbolic uprooting and erasing deeply rooted cultural references. The question is not merely whether a folktale is well written, but whether it continues to convey the wisdom of the local community and the collective memory that give it meaning.

III. Presentation of the Digital Corpus

1. Nature of AI-Generated Texts

The corpus comprises five folktales in the Kabyle language, generated by a text-based AI system (probably a large language model such as GPT or an equivalent system) in response to a prompt requesting traditional Kabyle folktales. Their titles are as follows:

- Tasekkurt d Wawal n Tiderfi (The Partridge and the Word of Freedom)
- Ajrad d Lmakla n Nnif (The Grasshopper and the Food of Honor)
- Lqæa d Nniya (The Sage and Intention)
- Tmacahutt n Tafunast d Yiles (The Tale of the Cow and the Tongue)
- Aqjun d Lhila (The Dog and Cunning)

These titles demonstrate the AI system's relative success in incorporating the themes and conventional figures of Kabyle folktales, including animal personification (Tasekkurt, Ajrad, Tafunast, and Aqjun), wisdom (Lqæa, Taqendurt), and moral values (Tiderfi, Nnif, Nniya, and Lhila).

2. General Structure of the Narratives

Brief and characterized by a linear, didactic progression, the narratives follow the basic narrative structure:

- Initial Situation: Presentation of the characters and the setting (often the Djurdjura Mountains, Ġerġer).
- Disrupting Element: An encounter or conflict (the partridge encounters other animals, the grasshopper is addressed, or the wise man must settle a dispute).
- Rising Action: Dialogue and the development of argumentation.
- Resolution: The conflict is resolved through a moral lesson.
- Final Situation: The lesson is learned, leading to a change in behavior.

3. Comparison with Traditional Kabyle Tales

A comparison with traditional Kabyle tales reveals thematic fidelity but structural simplification. Traditional tales are generally longer, their plot developments are more complex, and they contain a more elaborate supernatural dimension, including ogresses, jinn, and transformations. Artificial intelligence emphasizes the moral function at the expense of the ethnographic richness and narrative complexity characteristic of oral tradition.

4. Objectives of Selecting This Corpus

This selection is methodological in nature, as it makes it possible to isolate the influence of the algorithmic model on literary production. By examining what is preserved (themes) and what is lost or added (linguistic forms and values), we can assess the nature of the hybridization taking place and its implications for the future of Amazigh oral heritage.

IV. Linguistic Analysis

1. Lexicon and Semantic Fields

Lexical analysis reveals the use of basic Kabyle vocabulary, albeit with caution. The semantic fields primarily relate to nature (tasekkurt, ajrad, tafunast, idurar, tjeğğigt) and moral values (nnif, nniya, tiderfi, lhila). However, the lexicon often remains generic and lacks the richness of terms specific to the local environment and traditional practices.

2. Syntax and Narrative Style

The syntax is generally correct, but it tends toward standardization and simplicity, which contrasts with the complexity and variation of spoken language. The style is direct, favoring didactic clarity over rhetorical sophistication.

The dialogues, which are primarily functional, serve mainly to convey the moral lesson rather than to develop the characters psychologically.

3. Amazigh Variety Used (Standardized vs. Dialectal Kabyle)

The AI uses a form of Kabyle that resembles a de facto standardization, avoiding highly marked dialectal forms and regional variations. This neutralization is typical of models trained on heterogeneous written corpora, in which the most frequent forms tend to predominate. Although this standardization facilitates reading, it impoverishes linguistic diversity and weakens the connection to the local cultural environment.

4. External Influences

The analysis reveals traces of external influences, confirming the presence of linguistic hybridization:

Arabized expressions: Certain expressions or syntactic structures evoke either colloquial or Classical Arabic, such as the formula Yemma-s Rebbi (“Her mother is God,” used to express gratitude or trust in God) in Tale 2.

Gallicisms and French calques: These are less apparent, but several constructions seem to be modeled on French, particularly in the formulation of moral arguments.

Morphosyntactic neutralization specific to AI: This is the most notable phenomenon, characterized by a tendency to standardize verb forms and avoid complex grammatical structures, such as aspectual alternation, which are nevertheless characteristic of the richness of the Kabyle language.

V. Narrative Analysis

1. Characters (Animals, Wise Figures, and Villagers)

The characters correspond to archetypal figures: the partridge (Tasekkurt) embodies the explorer, the grasshopper (Ajrad) represents the honorable individual, and the old woman (Taqendurt) embodies wisdom. Their moral functions are clearly defined; however, they lack the depth and ambivalence found in traditional tales.

2. Actantial Structure

The actantial structure (subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent) is simplified. The object of the quest is almost always reduced to a moral value—freedom, honor, or truth—rather than a material object or a person. The sender is collective wisdom or tradition, while the receiver is the reader or listener. This simplification reinforces the didactic nature of the narratives.

3. Moral Function and Educational Dimension

The moral function is the most prominent characteristic. Each tale ends with an explicit lesson, often delivered by a wise character:

- Tale 1: The importance of the mother tongue (tutlayt n jeddi-k) as azgen n yiman (half of the soul, or identity).
- Tale 2: The value of honor (nnif) and hard work, which are considered superior to wealth.
- Tale 3: Truth (lḥeqq) belongs to the community (awal n taddart meṛṛa), not to the individual.
- Tale 4: Language is the truth of identity (tutlayt d tidet n yiman).
- Tale 5: Cunning (lḥila) must be exercised wisely (tṭrad d lḥila).

This moral emphasis is consistent with Kabyle tradition. However, the explicit articulation of the moral sometimes appears overly direct, lacking the subtlety and ambiguity that make the traditional tale a complex mirror of society.

4. Parallels and Deviations from the Classical Kabyle Model (Propp, Local Folklore)

The narratives follow Propp's functions in a very elementary manner (lack, mediation, receipt of a helper, etc.). However, the major deviation lies in the almost complete absence of the marvelous and symbolic violence (ogresses, monsters), which are essential elements of local folklore. AI has produced fables rather than wonder tales, prioritizing the ethical register over the mythical one.

5. Traces of Universal Scenarios Generated by AI

The analysis shows that universal scenarios emerge in the form of global themes:

Tale 1: The idea of "freedom" (Tiderfi) and identity as a personal choice (tidert d tikli) combines a modern value with traditional wisdom.

Tale 4: The issue of linguistic diversity (ttmeslayem s waṭas n tutlayin) is addressed from the perspective of coexistence rather than historical domination.

VI. Analysis of Exogenous Influences

1. Moral Universalization (Global Values)

AI-generated tales tend to present honor (nnif) and wisdom as universal concepts, whereas, in the Kabyle context, these values are associated with specific social practices and family structures.

2. Globalized Narrative Codification

The simplified and didactic narrative structure reflects a globalized form of codification typical of works intended for a broad, uninitiated audience. This simplification stems from the AI's training on Western corpora, such as Aesop's fables and Perrault's fairy tales, in which the moral lesson is expressed explicitly.

3. Erasure of Deep-Rooted Cultural References

AI has not incorporated the specific cultural references—such as rituals, sacred places, historical figures, or mythological characters—that give Kabyle tales their ethnographic richness. The use of generic place names, such as Ġerġer and At Yenni, is insufficient to firmly anchor the narrative in its local cultural context.

4. Introduction of Western Frameworks (Self-Improvement and Modern Rationalism)

Modern rationalism and the concept of "self-improvement" emerge in certain dialogues. In Tale 1, the idea that identity is a personal quest (Win ur nesei azgen, yezga yettqellab fell-as) reflects an individualistic interpretation that diverges from the collective and community-oriented conception of identity in Kabyle culture.

5. Risks of Cultural Standardization

The most significant external influence remains the risk of cultural standardization. If these AI-generated tales become widely disseminated, their simplicity and universal character could replace more complex traditional versions, thereby impoverishing the cultural heritage.

VII. Positive Contributions of Digital Technology

1. Accessibility and Wider Dissemination: Digital technology makes Amazigh literature more accessible and enables its wide dissemination. Online platforms reach diaspora communities and young people, ensuring a form of cultural heritage preservation.

2. Linguistic Revitalization: The production of texts in Kabyle by AI, even if imperfect, can become a means of linguistic revitalization by providing reading and learning materials.

3. Creation of Digital Archives: Digital technology makes it possible to establish archives of oral heritage, an essential undertaking for research and preservation.

4. Rapid Production of Educational Content: AI can rapidly generate educational materials, such as simplified tales and exercises, to support language teaching.

5. New Educational and Media Applications: AI paves the way for new applications, such as instant translation and the design of interactive educational materials.

VIII. Limitations and Risks

1. Loss of Spontaneity and Narrative Diversity: The main risk lies in the loss of spontaneity and narrative diversity. AI cannot reproduce oral performance, improvisation, or adaptation to the audience, all of which are at the heart of oral tradition.

2. Ethnographic Impoverishment: AI-generated tales often lack cultural depth, thereby disconnecting them from their original context.

3. Symbolic Uprooting: Symbolic uprooting occurs when universal values take precedence over local meanings, threatening the cultural identity and distinctive character of the tale.

4. Dependence on Global Cultural Models: Dependence on algorithms exposes Amazigh culture to a form of indirect cultural hegemony.

5. Problems of Linguistic Standardization

By imposing a linguistic norm, AI creates an artificial variety that replaces living varieties of the language and gives rise to standardization difficulties.

IX. General Discussion

1. Creative Hybridization or the Reinforcement of Cultural Dominance?

Is the observed hybridization a creative act, as described by Bhabha through his concept of the Third Space of Negotiation, or does it reinforce cultural dominance, as suggested by a form of homogenization in the Canclinian sense? The analysis reveals a form of imposed hybridization: even when AI uses the Kabyle language, it imposes narrative structures and values that diminish cultural authenticity.

2. How Can AI Be Integrated into the Amazigh Transmission Process?

The integration of AI must be critical and carefully controlled. AI should not replace the human storyteller but should remain a supporting tool.

3. Methods for Filtering, Adapting, and “Kabylicizing” Digital Productions

Methods must be developed to “Kabylicize” digital productions through the following measures:

- Training AI on authentic, annotated Kabyle-language corpora.
- Subjecting AI-generated content to human review in order to reintroduce linguistic richness and deeper cultural references.
- Adapting narratives to anchor them in the local cultural environment and oral tradition.

X. Conclusion and Perspectives

1. Summary of Findings

The analysis of a corpus of five AI-generated Kabyle tales reveals a paradoxical form of hybridization: apparent thematic fidelity conceals structural simplification, linguistic neutralization, and the introduction of universal values. Digital technology thus emerges as a double-edged tool: it facilitates dissemination while threatening cultural depth.

2. Challenges for Preservation and Research

The challenge lies in moving from a form of hybridization that is imposed to one that is consciously chosen and critically examined. Research should focus on developing digital tools that respect and highlight the complexity of oral tradition.

3. Perspectives

Digital Amazigh Corpora: Establishing databases of annotated folktales and oral poetry.

AI Trained on Local Sources: Developing Kabyle language models based on local corpora in order to preserve linguistic diversity.

Amazigh Heritage Platforms: Creating collaborative platforms for transmitting and archiving oral heritage.

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