

AI IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: PRESERVATION OR ERASURE OF CULTURAL NUANCE**Ugilo Karimova**

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Abstract: This study examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in literary translation with a focus on whether it preserves or erases cultural nuance. While neural machine translation (NMT) has advanced significantly, concerns persist regarding its capacity to capture metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded meanings. Using a comparative framework, the research analyzes selected case studies where AI-generated translations are compared against human translations in terms of fidelity, creativity, and cultural resonance. Findings suggest that AI systems tend to streamline or neutralize culturally specific references, prioritizing fluency over nuance. This creates a tension between accessibility and authenticity: while AI accelerates the translation process, it risks homogenizing literary voices across languages. The discussion highlights both the potential of hybrid human-AI collaboration and the ethical questions surrounding the loss of authorial intent and cultural diversity. Ultimately, the paper argues that AI in literary translation is best understood not as a replacement for human translators but as a tool that requires critical intervention to safeguard cultural richness in global literary circulation.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence in translation, literary translation, neural machine translation (NET), cultural nuance, idioms and metaphors, stylistic flattening, machine vs. Human translation, translation ethics.

Introduction

Translation is more than the translinguistic procedures, as it acts as a kind of cultural intermediation as well. Translators serve not only as language but also as intermediaries of different viewpoints, authority structures, and cultural traditions. This observation holds especially true in the area of literary translation, in which the trans linguistic conversion of poems, stories, and plays, densely enriched with aesthetic forms, metaphors, idioms, humor, and culturally distinctive allusions, is required. Cultural presuppositions incorporated in the literature largely account for the difficulties involved in its total mechanical reproduction.

Over the last few decades, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has had a significant impact on the field of translation. Neural machine translation systems, such as Google Translate, DeepL, and OpenAI's systems, have significantly improved the speed and fluency of translation processes. Such systems have the ability to study vast corpora of text and produce accurate, grammatically correct translations in the target language at a breathtaking pace. The potential of AI is already visible: faster translations, lower costs, and greater access to world literature for everyone.

However, a fundamental paradox goes unresolved. While artificial intelligence demonstrates remarkable competence in language processing, can it also capture the subtle cultural nuances typical of literature? Or will its algorithmic reasoning compel a reduction of cultural specifics to a monotonous standardization, thus churning out "domesticated" translations reducing outside material to the universal understanding Venuti (1995) proposes?

This article explores the above dilemma through a systematic analysis of the role of artificial intelligence in literary translation. It asks the question: Is artificial intelligence a protector of cultural nuances, or does it allow them to be lost? Through a comparison of AI-generated outputs

with human translations of texts rich in culture, this research compares the strengths and limitations of artificial intelligence in handling the complex layers of culture found in literature.

Methodology

This research employs a comparative qualitative research design. Since the focus is on cultural nuances—a characteristic that cannot easily be quantified—the research focuses on interpretative analysis.

1. Corpus Selection

Three model texts, chosen from a diverse cultural and linguistic background, were identified to ensure a wide range of the literary challenges faced.

1.1 Classical Japanese: The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu (11th century). Known for its Heian-era poetic language, courtly rituals, and subtle psychological descriptions. The text embodies a cultural universe distant from contemporary readers and rich in allusion.

1.2. Gabriel García Márquez's novel One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) is a founding text of magical realism, where metaphors, political allegories, and cultural stories overlap with great complexity. The challenge lies in keeping the fluidity of Spanish writing while, at the same time, finding one's way through the profound cultural allusions specific to Latin American culture.

1.3. Uzbek Literature: Brief stories contained in O'tkir Hoshimov's Dunyoning ishlari (The Affairs of the World, 1982) are closely embedded in the daily cultural, folk-based oral, and regional dialects typical of Uzbekistan. Translating such writing requires close familiarity with the socio-cultural environment in Central Asia.

2. AI Translation Tools

Three AI tools were selected to represent current state-of-the-art translation systems:

Google Translate (NMT baseline): Known for broad language coverage but criticized for literal tendencies.

DeepL: Praised for natural fluency and stylistic sensitivity, particularly in European languages.

GPT-powered Translation: Describing large language models with the capacity for contextually conscious rephrasing and stylistic modification.

3. Evaluation Framework

Translations were assessed on four different criteria:

3.1. Lexical accuracy – Compliance with the strict interpretation of the written material.

3.2. Stylistic Sensitivity – Ability to preserve rhythm, tone, and figurative language.

3.3. Cultural Sensitivity – The ability to understand idiomatic phrases, historical allusions, and multicultural viewpoints.

3.4. Narrative Cohesion – Having a consistent voice, formality, and intertextual harmony throughout different sections.

The performance of the AI systems was compared to that of human translations, after which an in-depth analysis followed.

Results

The comparative analysis yielded nuanced insights into AI's performance in literary translation.

1. Literal Fidelity vs. Cultural Meaning

Many of the machine intelligence-made translations achieved exactitude in language but lacked cultural subtlety.

Example 1 (Uzbek) Original: "Boshing osmonga yetdi."

The top of your head pointed towards the heavens.

Human Translator: "You felt great joy."

Here, the artificial intelligence kept the same imagery but dropped the pragmatic value of the idiomatic expression. Cultural reference—where joy is expressed as "rising to the sky"—did not come through to the English-reading public.

Example 2: Márquez's "la soledad de América Latina" was rendered by AI as "the solitude of Latin America." While accurate in form, the translation ignored the historical-political undertones of Latin America's cultural isolation in postcolonial contexts. Human translators

have often chosen “the loneliness of Latin America” or annotated the phrase to preserve its layered meaning.

2. Stylistic Simplification

In *The Tale of Genji*, much of the text’s beauty lies in its rhythm, parallelism, and poetic allusions. AI systems tended to simplify these into plain prose.

The delicate references to the cherry blossom are an emblem of beauty that is transitory.

The flowers fell away from the tree.

Like soft whispers of beauty, the flowers were scattered, reminding one of the ephemeral nature typical of spring.

The computer-generated sentences were coherent but lost the aesthetic beauty of the passage.

3. Limited Effectiveness in Metaphorical Explanation

AI demonstrated occasional success in universal metaphors.

Márquez's "un océano de tiempo" was well translated as "an ocean of time."

However, the translation of metaphors of culture often contained inexactness. Uzbek metaphors that use the notion of bread to represent life and ethics were translated literally, thus losing their moral meanings.

4. Contextual Weakness

While AI handled sentence-level translation fairly well, longer passages showed inconsistency. Narrative voices—particularly irony, humor, and intertextual echoes—were weakened. For example, in Hoshimov’s ironic portrayals of rural officials, AI flattened sarcasm into neutral description.

Discussion

The research suggests a split reality: the artificial intelligence excels in speed and accurate interpretation but fails to hold cultural nuances. The division represents the larger discourse in the community of translation studies.

1. AI as Eraser of Nuance

Adherents argue that artificial intelligence represents a profound step toward democratizing access to written literature. For those without access to uncommon translations, AI provides an initial encounter with foreign literature. Its success in terms of universal metaphors means that cultural nuances are not always erased—sometimes universally understandable human thought is maintained. Moreover, the rapidly evolving nature of AI suggests that stylistic features are increasingly adopted via training on literary corpora.

2. AI as Eraser of Nuance

However, limitations are stark. Artificial Intelligence lacks Ricoeur's (2006) sense of “linguistic hospitality,” integral to the process of translation—an ethical receptivity to the Other. Without knowledge deriving from cultural experience, AI cannot see subtleties like irony, satire, or intertextuality. This poses a threat to a homogenized world literature, where diverse voices become reduced to culturally neutralized expressions.

3. Ethical Considerations

Reliance solely on artificial intelligence risks suppressing marginalized cultural forms. For example, the oral forms that are part of Uzbek proverbs lose their local flavor when translated literally. Similarly, postcolonial writings that challenge Western domination may be made ineffective by AI translations that fail to capture the political undertones involved.

The translator's role as a cultural mediator cannot be replaced by algorithms.

4. Future Directions

A hybrid model seems most promising: AI-generated drafts followed by human revision. Such collaboration leverages AI’s efficiency while preserving human interpretive responsibility. Additionally, training AI on annotated cultural corpora could improve sensitivity to nuance. However, embodiment—the lived cultural experience—may remain beyond machine capacity.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence has undoubtedly transformed the field of literary translation in terms of unprecedented accessibility as well as speed. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that while AI retains certain dimensions of meaning, it often reduces the cultural nuances integral to literature. Metaphors, idioms, and historical referents are reduced to their literal equivalents, with a consequent loss of stylistic depth as well as cultural homogeneity. The future of literary translation should not be envisioned as a zero-sum game between machine intelligence and human professionals but as a collaborative endeavor in which AI is utilized to supplement linguistic support while human translators maintain cultural authenticity. Ultimately, cultural subtlety protection will rely more on human creativity, moral accountability, and intercultural competence and less on algorithmic processing. AI can be a powerful tool, but literature—rooted in human experience—requires human mediation to safeguard the plurality of cultural voices.

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