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Review Article

Literary Translation: Preserving Meaning, Voice, Culture, and Aesthetic Form in Novels, Poetry, Short Stories, Metaphors, Cultural References, and Idioms

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Abstract

Introduction: Literary translation differs from informational translation because literary works communicate through meaning, voice, rhythm, imagery, symbolism, cultural identity, characterization, and aesthetic effect. Novels, poetry, and short stories therefore require translators to balance semantic fidelity with the recreation of literary experience.

Objective: This paper examines the principal challenges of literary translation, focusing on novels, poetry, short stories, metaphors, cultural references, and idioms. It also evaluates the emerging role of artificial intelligence and proposes a genre-sensitive framework for literary translation and quality assessment.

Method: An integrative literature review was conducted using foundational theories of translation, cultural transfer, equivalence, translator visibility, rewriting, and descriptive translation studies, together with recent empirical research on literary machine translation, poetry translation, metaphor translation, lexical diversity, creativity, and literary evaluation.

Results: The synthesis shows that literary translation cannot be reduced to word-for-word correspondence. Novels require sustained attention to narrative voice and consistency; short stories require economy, pacing, and control of the ending; poetry requires negotiation among meaning, sound, rhythm, imagery, and ambiguity. Metaphors, idioms, and cultural references frequently require functional adaptation rather than literal substitution.

Conclusion: Literary translation is an interpretive and creative act in which the translator reconstructs a literary work for a new linguistic and cultural audience. Artificial intelligence can support exploration and drafting, but human literary judgment remains essential for preserving voice, cultural specificity, figurative meaning, and artistic identity.

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1. Introduction

Literary translation occupies a distinctive position within translation studies because literary works communicate through several layers at the same time. A novel tells a story but also creates a narrative voice, develops characters, establishes a social world, and organizes recurring images. A poem communicates through semantics while also foregrounding sound, rhythm, lineation, ambiguity, and metaphor. A short story may depend on a carefully controlled sequence of information in which a single repeated word becomes important only when the reader reaches the ending. For this reason, literary translation cannot be adequately described as replacing source-language words with target-language equivalents. The translator must interpret what a linguistic choice does within the literary work and then construct a target-language choice that performs a comparable function. Jakobson's account of translation emphasizes the complexity of transferring meaning across linguistic systems, while Nida's work distinguishes formal correspondence from effects and responses in the target audience [1,2]. Literary translation also involves culture. Venuti's work on translator invisibility shows that apparently transparent translations are shaped by choices concerning fluency, foreignness, and the target reader [3]. Toury's descriptive approach emphasizes that translated texts operate within the norms of receiving literary cultures [4]. Baker's discussion of equivalence similarly demonstrates that translation problems arise at lexical, grammatical, textual, pragmatic, and broader discourse levels [5].

The literary translator therefore works between two systems. The source text contains its own linguistic patterns, cultural references, literary conventions, and authorial choices. The target language has different grammatical possibilities, stylistic norms, cultural assumptions, and literary expectations. A successful translation must negotiate these systems without reducing the source to an easily domesticated paraphrase. Artificial intelligence adds a new dimension to this problem. Machine translation and large language models can generate fluent literary language, but their role must be assessed against the distinctive requirements of literary work. Rather than assuming that general fluency equals literary quality, the review examines where automated systems can assist and where human interpretation remains necessary. This review considers literary translation as a negotiation among semantic fidelity, stylistic reconstruction, cultural difference, and the expectations of readers. These demands become particularly visible when the translator moves between genres or encounters expressions whose literary effects cannot be captured through direct substitution. The purpose of the review is to bring together major theoretical and recent empirical perspectives on the translation of novels, short stories, and poetry, with particular attention to voice, metaphor, idiom, and culturally specific language. It also considers how translators choose between familiar and foreign forms of expression, how literary quality can be evaluated, and how artificial intelligence may be used without surrendering responsibility for the final text. The aim is not to prescribe one solution for every work, but to identify the questions that make informed translation decisions possible. The difference between literary and informational translation provides a useful point of departure. Both require accuracy, but literature also asks the translated text to create tension, mood, humor, ambiguity, and an experience of voice. Preserving the factual content of a sentence is therefore not always sufficient to preserve its literary purpose.

This difference can be understood through the concept of literary function. A sentence in a novel may establish social class through vocabulary. A dialect form may identify regional identity. A repeated image may foreshadow a thematic development. A syntactic irregularity may imitate a character's mental state. If these elements are normalized during translation, the target text may remain grammatically correct while losing an important part of the work. Literary translation therefore involves both preservation and transformation. The translator preserves what is central to the literary effect while transforming linguistic forms that cannot function naturally in the target language. This is why a strictly literal translation can sometimes be less faithful to the literary work than a carefully adapted one.

This distinction also helps explain the debate over fluency. As Venuti argues, an apparently effortless translation may make the translator less visible while diminishing the foreign texture of the source [3]. The problem is not fluency itself, but the

assumption that all stylistic or cultural difficulty should be removed for the reader.

2. Literature Review

The demands of literary translation change with genre, and the novel offers a particularly clear example. Translating a novel involves both the local problems of individual sentences and the larger architecture of a sustained narrative. Dialogue, metaphor, punctuation, and idiom must work alongside consistent characterization, chronology, recurring imagery, and point of view. One of the most important challenges is character voice. Characters should not sound identical unless the source deliberately presents them that way. An educated narrator, an elderly character, a child, and a streetwise speaker may use different vocabulary and syntax. If the translation converts all voices into a single neutral register, characterization can weaken. Long-range consistency is equally important. A recurring object or concept may be translated one way in chapter one and differently in chapter twenty, unintentionally changing the reader's understanding of the narrative. The translator should maintain a working record of character names, recurring phrases, cultural terms, titles, locations, and stylistic features.

Lexical diversity is another concern. Research on literary machine translation has found that MT can reduce lexical diversity relative to human translation, and that the degree of desired diversity differs across individual books [11]. This finding has an important implication for human translation as well: stylistic variation should not be introduced mechanically. A repetitive author should remain repetitive; a highly varied author should not be flattened into repetitive machine-like language. Novel translation therefore requires a macro-level reading strategy. The translator should understand the narrative architecture before making final decisions about recurring language, voice, and thematic imagery. Short fiction presents a related challenge in a more compressed form. Although a short story contains fewer words than a novel, each lexical choice may carry greater weight. With little room for narrative redundancy, a phrase can establish the tone, suggest an ending, or distinguish one character from another. Pacing is a central concern. The translator must preserve how quickly information reaches the reader. An English sentence may be divided into two target-language sentences for grammatical reasons, but doing so can unintentionally accelerate the narrative. Conversely, combining sentences can slow down a passage that depends on urgency.

Short stories also frequently rely on ambiguity. An author may intentionally leave the identity of a speaker, the cause of an event, or the meaning of an image uncertain. A translator who explains the ambiguity may provide more information than the source provides and thereby change the reader's experience. The ending deserves special attention. In many short stories, the final sentence or paragraph reinterprets earlier material. Translation decisions made without considering the ending can accidentally reveal information too early or weaken the final effect. Short-story translation is therefore best approached as a compressed system in which semantic, stylistic, and narrative decisions must be evaluated together. Poetry makes the relationship between form and meaning still more visible. Rhyme, meter, alliteration, assonance, line length, stanza structure, typography, and enjambment may all participate in what a poem means. A translation can preserve the dictionary sense of its words and yet lose the relationships that make those words memorable. Jakobson's account of poetic language is particularly relevant because poetic texts foreground the relationship between form and meaning [1]. In a poem, a word may be chosen partly because of its sound. A rhyme may connect two ideas. A repeated consonant may create harshness or softness. A short line may create hesitation. A translation that preserves dictionary meaning but destroys these formal relationships may fail as poetry.

Poetry translation is consequently a problem of competing priorities. The translator may preserve literal meaning, rhyme, rhythm, imagery, cultural reference, or ambiguity, but preserving all of them simultaneously may be impossible. The translator must determine which features are structurally important and where compensation can occur. Recent research on ChatGPT and poetry translation demonstrates both potential and persistent problems. Wang and colleagues investigated prompting and explanation-assisted approaches for English-Chinese poetry translation and showed that targeted guidance can improve results while significant weaknesses remain [10].

Research on classical Chinese poetry similarly indicates that current LLMs can struggle to satisfy adequacy, fluency, and elegance simultaneously [12]. Poetry translation should therefore be iterative. A translator should generate several versions, read each version as an independent poem, compare its rhythm and imagery with the source, and revise until the target text achieves a coherent literary identity. Across these genres, figurative language remains especially resistant to mechanical transfer. Metaphor is more than ornament: it can shape characterization, atmosphere, and the conceptual structure of a work. When grief is presented as a physical weight, for example, the image gives an abstract emotion a felt, bodily dimension.

A translator should identify three components before translating a metaphor: the image being created, the concept being communicated, and the function of the metaphor in the literary context. Literal transfer is appropriate only when the target-language metaphor preserves these functions naturally. Consider the invented expression 'The city swallowed him.' A literal translation may preserve the vocabulary but fail to communicate whether the city represents social pressure, anonymity, danger, emotional isolation, or loss of identity. The surrounding narrative determines which interpretation is relevant. Recent empirical work confirms that metaphor remains difficult for literary MT. Karakanta, Nas, and Dorst reported metaphor-translation accuracy between 64% and 80% in an English-Dutch literary MT study, with lexical and meaning errors among the most prominent problems [13]. More recent post-editing research found that approximately one-third of metaphors in machine-generated literary output were changed by post-editors, demonstrating the continuing difficulty of figurative language [16].

These findings support a functional strategy. The translator should preserve the metaphor when the image can operate naturally in the target language. If literal transfer would produce an opaque or misleading expression, adaptation may be necessary. If the metaphor is central to the author's style, however, excessive simplification should be avoided. Figurative difficulty is closely connected with cultural meaning. Literary works refer to food, clothing, festivals, institutions, forms of address, places, and historical events that may carry associations unavailable to readers in another language. The translator must decide not only what such references denote, but what they contribute to the particular scene. Aixelá's framework for culture-specific items emphasizes that translation requires strategic choices when source and target cultures do not share the same cultural reference points [8]. The translator may retain the original item, translate it literally, generalize it, explain it, substitute a comparable expression, or omit it when there is a compelling reason.

The correct choice depends on narrative function. A traditional dish may be a minor background detail, or it may reveal a character's social class and family history. A festival may simply establish a date, or it may be central to the novel's symbolism. A place name may carry historical associations that cannot be reproduced through a generic geographic label. Over-explanation can also be harmful. Footnotes or parenthetical explanations can interrupt narrative flow, especially in fiction. In some contexts, a subtle contextual clue within the target text is more effective than an external note. In other contexts, preserving the foreign term is itself an important aesthetic choice. Culture-specific translation is therefore a negotiation between accessibility, cultural specificity, narrative function, and reader expectations. Idiomatic expressions introduce another kind of contextual difficulty. Their meanings are conventional rather than fully recoverable from individual words: “spill the beans,” for instance, ordinarily refers to revealing information rather than a physical act. Register, emotional force, speaker identity, and narrative setting all help determine an appropriate rendering. Four broad strategies are especially useful. First, the translator can use a target-language idiom with a comparable meaning and register. Second, the translator can paraphrase the meaning when no suitable idiom exists. Third, the translator can retain a literal image if that image is meaningful and natural in the target language. Fourth, the translator can compensate elsewhere when an important stylistic effect cannot be preserved locally.

Research on metaphorical idioms in translations of Hongloumeng illustrates the difficulty of preserving both figurative meaning and imagery across languages [9]. The study highlights a general principle: idiom translation should be

judged according to function rather than word-level correspondence. Idioms also interact with characterization. A character who frequently uses colloquial idioms should not suddenly sound formal because the translator selected dictionary-like paraphrases. Register is part of meaning. The translator should therefore ask four questions for every difficult idiom: What does it mean here? Who is saying it? What social or emotional register does it carry? What literary effect does it create?

These decisions make the relationship between authorial voice and translator voice unavoidable. Lexical choice, syntax, punctuation, rhythm, and paragraphing all require interpretation; the translator is never simply absent from the target text. The relevant question is therefore not whether the translator has a voice but whether that voice serves the source work. A responsible translator attempts to make the target text coherent and literary without replacing the author's style with a personal stylistic signature. Translator voice becomes especially visible when the target language requires restructuring. A source author may prefer long periodic sentences, fragmented syntax, repetition, or unusual punctuation. The translator must decide which of these features are central to the author's identity and which can be transformed without damage.Venuti's discussion of invisibility demonstrates that fluent translations can make translator intervention difficult to see [3]. For literary scholarship, this is important because the target text is not a transparent window onto the source. It is a new literary artifact produced through translation.

One way to understand these choices is through the distinction between domestication and foreignization. Domestication adapts unfamiliar references or conventions to the expectations of target readers, whereas foreignization allows more of the source culture's linguistic and social difference to remain visible. Neither strategy is universally correct. Excessive domestication can erase cultural identity, while excessive foreignization can create a text that feels unnecessarily inaccessible. The translator should instead make strategic choices according to the role of the cultural element. For example, a culturally specific form of address may be preserved because it establishes social hierarchy. A literal translation of a food name may be retained if the unfamiliarity is part of the character's experience. A minor reference may be paraphrased if a detailed explanation would interrupt the narrative. Toury's concept of translation norms is useful because it places such choices within the receiving literary culture [4]. Lefevere's concept of rewriting further emphasizes that translations participate in literary systems and can influence how authors and cultures are represented [7]. The goal is therefore not a rigid commitment to either foreignization or domestication but a deliberate balance between cultural integrity and communicative effectiveness. Such choices matter beyond the style of a single passage. Literary translation also influences how a culture is represented to readers elsewhere. The translator, together with publishers and editors, helps determine which local practices, social distinctions, and historical associations remain legible in the translated work.

This means that translation can contribute to cultural representation. A translation that removes local expressions, social distinctions, or culturally specific imagery may produce a smoother text but a narrower representation of the source culture. Conversely, a translation that preserves every unfamiliar expression without considering target readers may become difficult to understand. Cultural integrity does not require maximum foreignness. It requires preserving the culturally meaningful information and literary functions that matter to the work. The translator's task is consequently ethical as well as aesthetic. Cultural references should not be altered casually simply because a target-culture equivalent feels more familiar. The introduction of large language models changes the tools available to translators but does not remove these interpretive dilemmas. A model can propose alternative phrasings, suggest possible readings of an ambiguous image, or generate versions with different rhythmic or stylistic priorities. However, AI-generated literary language should not be confused with literary judgment. A fluent output can still flatten lexical diversity, simplify unusual syntax, weaken character voice, or alter cultural references. Research on literary MT has shown that machine-generated texts may be lexically poorer than human translations, and that the desired level of lexical diversity differs from book to book [11].

Research on ChatGPT's creativity in literary translation found that prompting configuration affects output and that certain configurations can

improve creative performance, but the systems still underperformed human translation in the study [14]. This suggests that prompting can shape a model's behavior but does not eliminate the need for human editorial control. Recent work has proposed using LLMs as tools that extend rather than replace literary creativity. Resende and Hadley describe prompt strategies that can support literary translators during pre-translation and translation, particularly in poetry [15]. This model is more consistent with the nature of literary work because it treats AI as a source of alternatives and analytical assistance. Taken together, this research suggests that AI may broaden the range of possible renderings, but selecting among them still calls for informed human judgment about context, voice, and artistic effect. The difficulty of judging literary translation becomes even more evident when different kinds of quality are considered together. A translation may be semantically accurate yet stylistically unconvincing; another may read beautifully while introducing changes the source does not support. No single numerical measure captures this tension. Recent research on LITEVAL-CORPUS demonstrates the importance of evaluator expertise. Zhang, Zhao, and Eger found that the adequacy of human evaluation is influenced by the complexity of the evaluation scheme and by evaluator expertise, with higher expertise producing more adequate assessments [12]. Specialized evaluation research has also challenged the assumption that standard MT metrics are sufficient for literary translation. LiTransProQA was developed to incorporate professional literary-translator knowledge and focus on literary devices, cultural understanding, and authorial voice [17].

These findings suggest that literary evaluation should use several layers. First, semantic fidelity should be checked. Second, voice and style should be assessed. Third, figurative language should be examined. Fourth, cultural references should be reviewed. Finally, an experienced literary reader should evaluate whether the target text functions as literature. Evaluation should also consider the relationship between source and target rather than judging the target text in isolation. A beautiful target-language sentence is not necessarily a successful translation if it changes the source's meaning or literary function.

3. Methodology

This paper uses an integrative literature-review approach, drawing on foundational translation theory and selected contemporary empirical studies. The theoretical framework includes Jakobson, Nida, Venuti, Toury, Baker, Bassnett, and Lefevere, whose work addresses equivalence, translation norms, translator visibility, literary systems, and rewriting [1–7]. Aixelá's discussion of culture-specific items supports the analysis of culturally marked references [8]. The more recent studies examined in the review address metaphorical idioms [9], machine-assisted poetry translation [10,12,15], lexical diversity [11], metaphor translation and post-editing [13,16], creative prompting [14], literary evaluation [12,17], and the predictability of literary translation [18]. These studies are used to test and extend the theoretical discussion rather than to treat one language pair or model as representative of all literary translation.

The sources were read thematically across five connected dimensions: semantic meaning, style and voice, genre-specific form, cultural meaning, and figurative language. This is a synthesis of published scholarship, not a new comparative translation experiment. Its results therefore identify recurring challenges and practical implications rather than report newly collected performance measurements.

The analytical dimensions also suggest a practical sequence for translation decisions. Figure 1 presents a genre-sensitive workflow, beginning with a reading of the complete work and moving through contextual research, drafting, and revision. It is offered as a proposed working model, not as an experimental procedure carried out in this review.

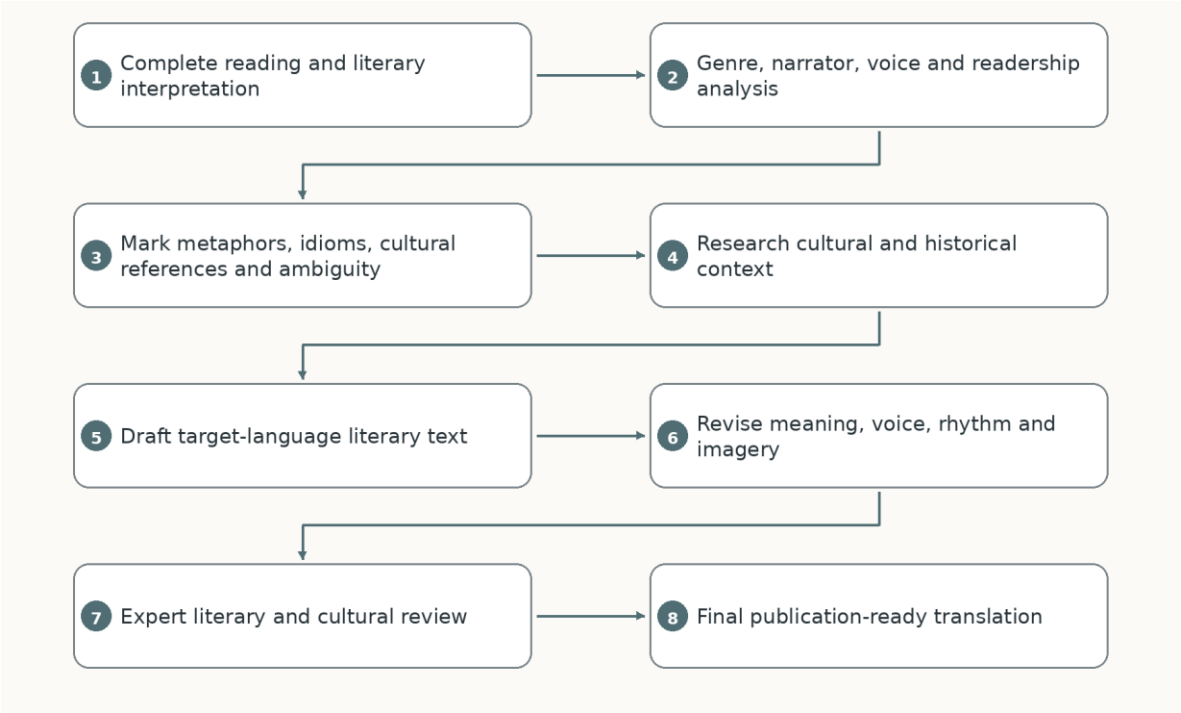


Figure 1: Genre-sensitive literary translation workflow.

A comparable division of responsibilities is needed when AI is introduced. Figure 2 illustrates a controlled process in which the translator first interprets the work, considers AI-generated alternatives where useful, and then revises and evaluates the chosen wording. The sequence keeps the technology in a supporting role and reserves final literary approval for a human reader or translator.

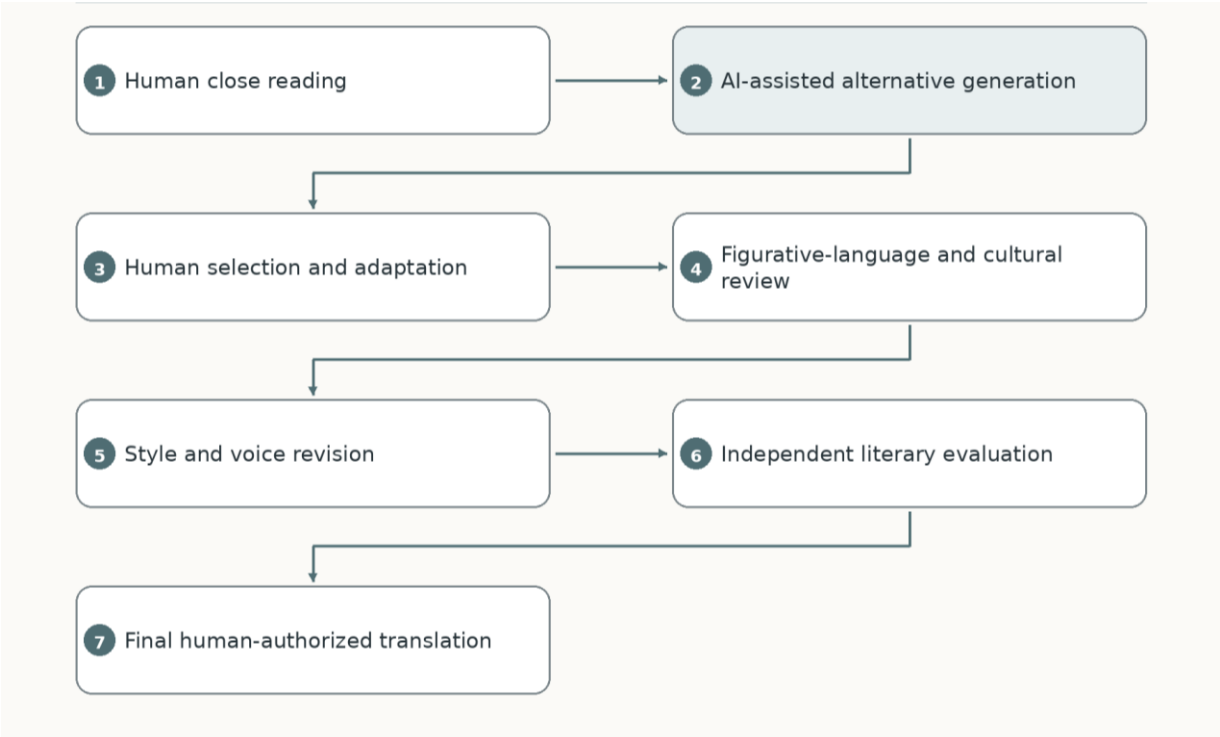


Figure 2: Controlled AI-assisted literary translation workflow.

4. Results

The literature synthesis produced six major findings. First, literary translation requires preservation of both semantic content and literary

function. A translation can be informationally accurate while still failing to recreate voice, rhythm, imagery, characterization, or atmosphere.

Second, genre strongly determines translation priorities. Novels require long-range consistency and differentiated character voices. Short stories require compression, pacing, controlled ambiguity, and special attention to endings. Poetry requires negotiation among semantic meaning, sound, rhythm, lineation, imagery, and cultural allusion.

Third, metaphors and idioms remain high-risk areas because their meaning is contextual and often non-compositional. Literal translation can preserve individual words while losing the conceptual or emotional function of the expression.

Fourth, cultural references require strategic decisions about retention, adaptation, explanation, generalization, and substitution. The best choice depends on narrative function, target readership, and the cultural importance of the reference.

Fifth, literary translation requires expert evaluation. Conventional automatic metrics may identify useful linguistic signals, but literary quality also involves voice, cultural specificity, figurative language, and aesthetic effect.

Sixth, AI can be useful as a literary-assistance technology. It can generate alternatives, support exploratory drafting, and help translators examine difficult passages. However, the reviewed evidence supports a human-centered model in which professional translators remain responsible for interpretation, stylistic coherence, cultural decisions, and final publication quality.

The genre-specific patterns identified in the review are easier to compare when their practical implications are considered together. Table 1 sets out the central challenges, the literary features that merit particular care, and useful approaches for each genre or linguistic element. These are guides to judgment rather than fixed rules.

Table 1: Genre-sensitive priorities in literary translation

Literary element	Primary challenge	What should be preserved	Preferred approach
Novel	Long-range consistency, narrative voice and characterization	Voice, motifs, world-building, character differentiation	Whole-work reading, terminology tracking, repeated revision
Short story	Compression, pacing and ending	Narrative economy, suspense, controlled ambiguity	Context-sensitive translation with special review of final passages
Poetry	Meaning versus sound and form	Imagery, rhythm, lineation, ambiguity, aesthetic effect	Multiple drafts, prioritization and compensation
Metaphor	Literalization and image loss	Image, concept, emotional and thematic function	Functional preservation or creative adaptation
Cultural reference	Cultural distance and explanatory burden	Identity, historical/social meaning, narrative relevance	Retention, contextualization, adaptation or selective explanation
Idiom	Non-compositional meaning and register	Meaning, register, pragmatic and stylistic function	Equivalent idiom, paraphrase, literal image or compensation

The broader approach must then be tested against the purpose of a particular expression. Table 2 connects metaphors, idioms, cultural references, and other recurring difficulties with diagnostic questions and possible interventions. It also makes clear what can be lost when a translator chooses a superficially convenient solution.

Table 2: Diagnostic strategy for difficult literary elements

Problem	Diagnostic questions	Possible strategies	Main risk if mishandled
Metaphor	What image, concept and literary function are present?	Preserve image; adapt image; compensate elsewhere	Flattened symbolism or unintended literal meaning
Idiom	What does it mean here and who is saying it?	Target idiom; paraphrase; literal image; compensation	Loss of register or characterization
Cultural reference	Why is this reference present?	Retain; contextualize; adapt; generalize selectively	Cultural erasure or excessive explanation
Dialect / sociolect	What identity or relationship does the speech signal?	Target-language social/register equivalent; selective markers	Characters become linguistically indistinguishable
Ambiguity	Is uncertainty intentional?	Preserve ambiguity unless context requires resolution	Over-explanation and loss of authorial design
Repetition	Is the repetition thematic or accidental?	Preserve meaningful repetition; vary only when target-language constraints require	Loss of motif or stylistic rhythm

Technology-assisted translation raises a related question of responsibility. Being able to produce fluent alternatives does not establish that those alternatives are artistically or culturally adequate. Table 3 distinguishes work that AI can usefully support from the interpretive and editorial decisions that remain with the human translator.

Table 3: Human and AI roles in literary translation

Stage	AI contribution	Human contribution	Final authority
Pre-translation	Generate background questions, terminology candidates and alternative readings	Interpret the work; establish translation brief and priorities	Human
Drafting	Produce candidate translations and stylistic alternatives	Select, rewrite and contextualize candidates	Human
Figurative language	Generate multiple metaphor or idiom options	Evaluate image, function, register and cultural effect	Human
Revision	Identify repetition, terminology variation and possible inconsistencies	Decide which variation is stylistically intentional	Human
Evaluation	Assist with comparison and error detection	Conduct literary, cultural and source-target assessment	Human
Publication	No autonomous authority	Final editorial approval and accountability	Human

5. Discussion

Considered together, the findings present literary translation as a form of creative interpretation within the constraints of a source work. Fidelity is not confined to copying words or grammatical

structures; it includes the relationships among voice, rhythm, imagery, character, and the cultural world of the text. The question for translators is therefore not simply whether a sentence is accurate, but whether it continues to do comparable work in another language.

Theories of equivalence provide a starting point for understanding why literal correspondence is insufficient [1,2,5]. Cultural and descriptive theories then explain why translation decisions are shaped by target-language norms and cultural systems [3,4,8]. Rewriting theory further emphasizes that translation can influence literary reputation and cultural representation [7]. The genre analysis reinforces these theoretical insights. Novels demand continuity across long stretches of text. Short stories demand economy and controlled pacing. Poetry makes form itself part of meaning. Metaphors and idioms require functional interpretation, while cultural references require negotiation between foreignness and accessibility.

AI-assisted translation introduces both opportunity and risk. The opportunity is an expanded option space: a translator can request alternative metaphors, compare registers, explore rhyme patterns, or test different levels of cultural adaptation. The risk is that fluent output can disguise interpretive errors. Recent empirical work on metaphor translation, poetry, creativity, lexical diversity, and post-editing confirms that literary difficulty remains even when the generated language sounds polished [10-16]. The evaluation problem is equally important. If a metric rewards lexical similarity or surface fluency, it may prefer a machine translation that is mechanically smooth but artistically weaker. Specialized literary evaluation research therefore incorporates literary devices, cultural understanding, and authorial voice [17].

A human-centered approach follows from this evidence, although it should not be confused with a rejection of technology. Automated tools are useful when they widen the translator's choices or draw attention to possible problems. They become less reliable when fluent output is accepted as an adequate substitute for close reading, comparison with the source, and experienced editorial judgment. In practical terms, the strongest safeguard begins before drafting. Translators should read the complete work, establish a brief describing the intended readership and stylistic priorities, and record recurring images, names, expressions, and character voices. These notes are particularly valuable in novels, where choices made in one chapter may have consequences much later.

Figurative and culturally specific language needs a similarly deliberate approach. Metaphors and idioms should be read in their narrative setting before an equivalent is chosen, and meaningful ambiguity should not be resolved merely to make a passage easier. Cultural adaptation is useful when it preserves a reference's role in the work; it is less defensible when it replaces a socially or historically important detail with an unrelated familiar one. For poetry, competing versions should be compared for imagery, sound, rhythm, lineation, and sense before a final wording is selected.

Where AI is used, its suggestions should be treated as drafts or prompts for further thought, not as decisions that no longer require scrutiny. A final reading should test the translation both against the source and as a literary work in its own right. For publication, a second reader with relevant literary and cultural expertise can help detect losses that are easy to miss after repeated revision.

These conclusions have limits. The paper reviews existing scholarship rather than comparing new translations under controlled conditions. Judgments about literary quality depend on genre, language pair, historical period, individual style, translator expertise, and the expectations of readers. Second, the empirical literature on AI-assisted literary translation is still developing rapidly. Model behavior changes with model versions, prompts, fine-tuning, retrieval resources, and evaluation procedures. A conclusion about one model version should not automatically be generalized to future systems. Third, most recent computational studies examine selected language pairs and relatively constrained datasets. Literary translation across less-resourced languages, oral traditions, regional dialects, and multilingual literary works remains under-researched.

Finally, concepts such as equivalence, translator visibility, foreignization, and domestication remain debated within translation studies. They are useful for asking better questions about translation choices, but they should not be treated

as universal formulas.

6. Conclusion

Literary translation is a complex process of linguistic, cultural, and artistic reconstruction. The translator does not merely transfer what a text says; the translator also works to preserve how the text speaks, what it evokes, how characters sound, how images recur, and how readers experience the work. Novels, short stories, and poetry impose different priorities, while metaphors, idioms, and cultural references create additional problems that cannot be solved through word-for-word substitution. The most effective approach is functional and genre-sensitive: understand the literary purpose of an element first, then select a target-language solution capable of recreating that purpose.

Artificial intelligence can provide valuable assistance by generating alternatives, supporting exploratory work, and helping translators examine difficult passages. Nevertheless, literary translation remains fundamentally dependent on human interpretation and aesthetic judgment. The strongest model is therefore not autonomous machine translation but controlled human–AI collaboration in which technology expands possibilities and the human translator remains the final literary decision-maker.

Declarations

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.
Author Contributions (CRediT): All authors contributed equally and approved the final manuscript.
Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Funding: This research received no external funding.
Use of Artificial Intelligence: ChatGPT (version 4.5) was used for language editing only; it was not used to generate data, perform analyses or draw conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the content.
Data Availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.
Peer Review: Externally peer-reviewed by independent reviewers in a double-blind process.

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