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AI-Powered Literary Translation: A Case Study of Persian Translations of *Charles*

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Abstract

The rapid development of artificial intelligence in recent years has transformed the field of translation studies. Contemporary AI-based translation tools offer unprecedented speed and accuracy in reproducing linguistic, cultural, and stylistic features, a level of performance not witnessed a decade ago. As these technologies have grown more advanced, their application in literary translation has increased, raising new questions about their effectiveness in conveying meaning, authorial artistic intentions, and culturally connoted forms of expression. This paper examines the use of AI-assisted translation strategies in literary translation, focusing on Persian translations of Shirley Jackson's short story *Charles* produced by QuillBot Translate, OpenL Translate, and Google AI Studio. Employing Vinay and Darbelnet's framework of direct and oblique translation procedures, the study analyzes how these tools handle problematic linguistic and cultural features. The analysis considers culture-specific items, idioms, passive constructions, and manner adverbs, all of which the AI tools tended to render literally, even when a more sophisticated approach was required to convey stylistic or emotional nuance. Overall, the results indicate that while AI systems prioritize semantic fidelity, they remain limited in their capacity to recreate the higher levels of meaning and literary artistry embedded in the source text.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI-powered translation, *Charles*, translation strategy

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1. Introduction

In recent years, significant advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have profoundly transformed translation studies, enabling the use of automated systems to facilitate global communication with unprecedented speed and accuracy (Zhang & Zong, 2020; Toral & Way, 2014). Nevertheless, literary translation remains one of the most complex domains, as it requires not only linguistic accuracy but also the preservation of tone, rhythm, emotional depth, and the cultural subtleties inherent in creative works (Kenny & Winters, 2020; Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2020). Unlike technical or scientific texts, literary prose demands careful attention to authorial intent, idiomatic expressions, and embedded cultural references, challenges that continue to pose significant difficulties for machine-based systems (Matusov, 2019).

Previous research, such as the study by Maleki and Heidari Tabrizi (2017), highlighted the limitations of machine translation (MT) in the past. This study compared human translation (HT) with Google Translate (GT) in handling different types of ellipsis in English-to-Persian translation and found that HT significantly outperformed MT in reconstructing omitted material and maintaining textual cohesion. These findings emphasized the shortcomings of MT at the time, which primarily relied on sentence-level processing and struggled with ambiguity and cultural transfer.

Over time, AI has made substantial progress through the development of neural machine translation (NMT) and large language models (LLMs), which can better capture context, colloquial expressions, and nuanced meanings, thereby improving translation quality across various language pairs, including English-Persian (Zhang et al., 2024). These advancements have made more natural and accurate translations possible even in complex and literary texts, although errors such as content omissions or insufficient preservation of authorial voice still occur, highlighting the continued need for human intervention (Zhang et al., 2024).

To analyze the performance of AI tools in literary translation more systematically, this study employs Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958/1995) model of translation procedures, which distinguishes between direct strategies of borrowing, calque, and literal translation, and oblique strategies, including transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation (Munday, 2022). This framework provides a structured lens for evaluating how AI handles linguistic and cultural challenges and for comparing these strategies with human translation practices (Corpas Pastor & Noriega-Santiáñez, 2024).

Ultimately, the present study aims to investigate the translation strategies employed by AI tools in rendering English literary texts into Persian and to assess their alignment with Vinay and Darbelnet's model. By focusing on the analysis of translation strategies, this research sheds light on AI's ability to convey semantic and cultural subtleties and explores the potential role of human-AI collaboration in the creative translation process (Carl & Braun, 2017; Corpas Pastor, 2021).

2. Literature Review

In the past decade, machine translation (MT) has undergone a dramatic transformation and has switched the paradigms of rule-based and statistical phrase-based machine translation (PBSMT) to neural machine translation (NMT), and large language models (LLMs) (Zhang & Zong, 2020; Toral & Way, 2014; Matusov, 2019). On novels NMT was also significantly superior to PBSMT, trained on large literary corpora on automatic metrics, like BLEU (Toral & Way, 2018). Not solely the more resourceful languages were competent with state-of-the-art LLMs, but were also mind-blowingly robust on pivot prompting on remote languages (Jiao et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Literary translation, however, has been among the most challenging fields because of its ambiguous, ironic language style and culture combination (Kenny & Winters, 2020; Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2020). NMT and LLMs were weak in authorial voice, rhythm and puns, and creative wordplay and required intensive human post-editing (Toral et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2020; Monti et al., 2024; Corpas Pastor & Noriega-Santiáñez, 2024). The idioms and culture-specific items (CSIs) were translated in a literal form and failed consistently. NMT and past LLMs tended to produce an idiomatic phrase that was meaningless or culturally insensitive (Baziotis et al., 2023; He et al., 2023; Sentov, 2023). The state-of-the-art systems made the phenomena culturally loaded in morphologically rich languages such as Arabic or Persian (Al Maaytah, 2025; Bhattacharyya et al., 2023).

With full automation, the systems have yet to reach the same degree of innovation and faithful style. Some of the strategies that human translators have continuously applied to the task but machines only have introduced occasionally are modulation, adaptation, and cultural reframing (Ruffo, 2018; Munday, 2022; Corpas Pastor, 2021; Noriega-Santiáñez, 2025;). The so-called human-machine parity has also been proclaimed too hard, when measured only against surface features; even in the case of the literary text, there was always a qualitative distinction between stylistic cohesion, narrative flow, and creative purpose (Läubli, 2020; Toral & Way, 2018; Zhang et al., 2024).

Even high-performing raw MT output in the settings of both literature and multi-domain, to the best of the latest WMT, which distributed the work in the post-editing stage, did not presuppose the absence of human correction (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023). Further recent research also emphasized these shortcomings, with Noriega-Santiáñez and Corpas Pastor (2025) proposing new creative phraseology measures to the literature on literary translation on top of earlier ones, demonstrating that the current LLMs still lagged far behind human translators in style originality.

That is why researchers have believed in the concept of hybrid workflows, in which machine-generated drafts are refined through the creative human post-editing that will not only be efficient (Carl & Braun, 2017; Briva-Iglesias, 2024). In summary, NMT and LLMs have been capable of showing impressive lexical and syntactic accuracy, yet their performance in literary translation, particularly in translation into Persian, has demonstrated their lack of cultural sensitivity, idiomatic translation, stylistic accuracy, and creative translation (Al Maaytah, 2025; Corpas Pastor & Noriega-Santiáñez, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Getting meaning across effectively depends on a mix of things, like cultural background, idioms, and the delicate ways languages play off each other. This gets even tougher with literary texts, which are layered with multiple dimensions and deeply rooted in culture. Literary translation is not mechanical at all—it requires a solid grasp of both the source and target cultures, plus a keen eye for the original's artistic touches, like tone, voice, and figurative language. Keeping the beauty and style of the text intact is just as important as nailing the basic meaning.

This study aimed to conduct an extensive and meticulous investigation into the performance of artificial intelligence within the intricate domain of literary translation, specifically focusing on the adequacy of AI-powered Persian translations of the English short story *Charles* by Shirley Jackson across multiple dimensions. The research aimed to provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of AI's ability to navigate the complex linguistic, stylistic, and cultural elements inherent in literary texts, addressing three key aspects outlined in the research questions.

3. Method

The present study adopted a comparative descriptive design to investigate the types and patterns of translation strategies employed by artificial intelligence systems, without measuring them

statistically. The source text was Shirley Jackson's short story *Charles*, chosen for its ironic and psychological tones, distinctive narrative voice, and cultural nuances, which pose complex demands for literary translation. Three AI-powered tools were selected for analysis: Google AI Studio (based on the Gemini 2.5 Pro model), Quill Bot Translate (using proprietary models fine-tuned on Llama-3 70B and Mixtral 8x22B), and OpenL Translate (the publicly hosted version of LibreTranslate, running the opus-mt-en-fa model from the Helsinki-NLP group). Each represents a sophisticated neural machine translation platform but differs in algorithms and linguistic capacity, offering a sound basis for comparison.

Three trained raters assessed the Persian translations produced by these systems. All were postgraduate students in English-Persian translation with substantial theoretical and practical experience. Their task was to detect and classify translation strategies according to Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958/1995) model, which distinguishes between direct (literal) methods such as borrowing, calque, and literal translation, and oblique (free) methods such as transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. The same English text was translated by all three AI systems under identical conditions, with no human editing or post-processing, yielding Persian versions of equal length and scope. Each rater independently examined the English original alongside the three translations, identifying strategies on a sentence-by-sentence basis. Particular attention was paid to how each AI system handled idiomatic expressions, humour, and the childlike narrative tone of Jackson's story. Identified strategies were grouped and coded according to function, enabling the study to trace each system's prevailing patterns and to determine whether they inclined toward literal, word-for-word translation or adopted a more adaptive, flexible approach.

4. Findings

The analysis of the Persian translations of Shirley Jackson's *Charles*, produced by three AI systems, revealed a consistent tendency across all tools: they predominantly relied on literal, form-oriented techniques prioritising semantic accuracy over stylistic, cultural, or interpretive nuance. Consequently, while the translations were largely grammatically and lexically correct, they failed to capture the rhetorical richness and literary merit of the source text. Idiomatic expressions were rendered word-for-word, producing clumsy or unnatural Persian equivalents that preserved literal meaning but lost figurative force and stylistic flair. Similarly, culture-specific items were either translated literally or borrowed directly, often resulting in culturally insensitive versions, with only rare and isolated instances of target-culture adaptation. Passive structures exhibited the same structural mirroring: although grammatically permissible in Persian, native literary conventions favour active constructions for more natural prose, yet the AI systems retained English passive forms, yielding technically correct but stiff or unnatural phrasing. Adverbs of manner were consistently converted into simple Persian equivalents that conveyed denotative meaning but failed to reproduce the original's emotional intensity, tonal contrast, or stylistic subtlety. Creative or localised renderings were almost entirely absent, reflecting the systems' insensitivity to subtle narrative cues. Overall, while the translations were largely grammatically and lexically correct, they failed to capture the rhetorical richness and literary merit of the source text. This pattern manifested across four linguistic domains: idiomatic expressions, culture-specific items, passive voice structures, and adverbs of manner.

4.1. AI-Powered Translation of Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are linguistic units whose meaning cannot be determined solely by the combination of their constituent words. For example, the English term "kicks the bucket" does not refer literally to striking a pail but rather denotes death. The principal challenge of idioms is their

deep connection to the cultural, historical, and social background of the source language, meaning they often lack direct equivalents in the target language.

Table 1 presents the categorization of translation strategies according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), whose model divides strategies into two broad categories: direct translation and oblique translation. The table indicates how the three AI-driven translation systems employed these strategies when rendering idiomatic phrases. The majority of cases involved direct translation, with only isolated instances of oblique strategies such as modulation and equivalence.

Table 1. Translation of Idiomatic Expressions

Source Text	OpenL Translate	Quill Bot	Google AI Studio	Strategy
His father's eyes widened.	چشمان پدرش گشاد شد.	چشمان پدرش گشاد شد.	چشمان پدرش گشاد شد.	Direct/ Literal
I want to get a look at her.	می‌خواهم او را ببینم.	می‌خواهم نگاهی به او بیندازم.	می‌خوام ببینمش.	Direct/ Literal
You must have your hands full in that kindergarten.	شما حتما در آن مهدکودک با چارلز دستتان پر است.	باید در آن مهدکودک با چارلز دستت خیلی پر باشد.	حتما تو اون کودکستان دستتون با چارلز خیلی پره.	Direct/ Literal
When you've got a Charles to deal with	وقتی با یک چارلز سر و کار داری	وقتی با یک چارلز سر و کار داری	وقتی با یه چارلز سر و کار داری	Oblique/ Equivalence

4.2. AI-Powered Translation of Culture Specific Items

The transfer of culture-specific items (CSIs) between source and target languages represents one of the most critical and complex issues in literary translation. Such items include objects, customs, beliefs, and concepts that are deeply rooted in a particular culture and carry specific semantic, emotional, and cultural implications for its members. Translating these items cannot be reduced to a simple process of word transfer; rather, it demands profound knowledge of both the source and target cultures. The major difficulty arises when concepts or objects lack immediate equivalents in the target language or do not resonate with the target audience. In such situations, literal translation or borrowing fails to convey the original semantic and emotional weight, resulting in cultural disconnection between the source text and the reader.

Table 2. Translation of Culture-Specific Items

Source Text	AI Systems	AI Translations
Marshmallow	Quill Bot	کیک مارشمالو
	OpenL Translate	کیک مارشمالو
	Google AI Studio	کیک مارشمالو
Kindergarten	Quill Bot	کودکستان
	OpenL Translate	مهدکودک
	Google AI Studio	مهدکودک

In Table 2, for the term marshmallow, all three AI translations employed the direct borrowing strategy. For the term kindergarten, OpenL Translate and Google AI Studio applied the direct/literal strategy, whereas Quill Bot employed the oblique adaptation strategy.

4.3. AI-Powered Translation of Passive Voice

Grammatical differences between active and passive constructions constitute a persistent challenge in translation between English and Persian. The passive voice is used extensively in English, particularly when the agent is unspecified or when the author wishes to emphasize the action or its outcome. This grammatical feature allows the author to shift thematic focus and highlight different dimensions of the text. In contrast, Persian tends to favor the active voice, with passive constructions being relatively sparse and context-dependent. Directly translating English passive sentences into Persian without regard for the target language's grammatical and stylistic norms can produce awkward, unnatural, or even incoherent sentences that disrupt narrative flow and confuse Persian readers. Passive constructions in Persian carry different semantic and functional loads than their English counterparts, a consideration that must inform any translation.

Table 3. Translation of Passive Voice

Source Text	AI Systems	AI Translations
His cap on the floor	OpenL Translate	کلاهش روی زمین افتاد.
	Quill Bot	کلاهش روی زمین افتاد.
	Google AI Studio	کلاهش روی زمین افتاد.
The front door slamming open	OpenL Translate	درب جلو به شدت باز شد.
	Quill Bot	درب جلو با صدای بلندی باز شد.
	Google AI Studio	در ورودی با صدای بلندی باز شد.
The voice suddenly become raucous.	OpenL Translate	صدایش به طور ناگهانی خشن شد.
	Quill Bot	صدایش ناگهان خشن شد.
	Google AI Studio	صدایش که ناگهان خشن شده بود

According to Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model, all three examples in Table 3 adopted the direct/literal strategy, which preserves the passive forms of English. However, this approach is not appropriate for Persian. As shown in the table, all three AI translations rendered the source sentences using passive or stative constructions, which lack fluency in Persian.

4.4. AI-Powered Translation of Adverbs of Manner

Adverbs of manner represent one of the most difficult aspects to translate in literary texts. They convey far more than the manner in which an action is performed; they carry emotional coloring, tone, and authorial style. Persian rarely provides tidy, one-to-one equivalents for these items. The paradigmatic seven-procedure framework of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) was used to examine how the three AI tools processed English adverbs of manner. Based on the stylistic role of these adverbs in Shirley Jackson's story, they were divided into two categories: speech-act adverbs (modifying verbs of saying and thinking) and physical-action adverbs (modifying verbs of movement and behaviour), then analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

In literary discourse, adverbs of manner encode tone, attitude, emotional intensity, and narrative perspective. Their translation, particularly in a first-person narrative like *Charles*, is critically sensitive to style and interpretive nuance and cannot be achieved through strictly literal procedures. The Vinay and Darbelnet model postulates that such items usually require oblique strategies such as modulation or equivalence.

Table 4. Translation of Speech-Act – Adverbs of Manner

Source Text	OpenL Translate	QuillBot Translate	Google AI Studio	Strategy

Asked quickly	سریع پرسیدم	سریع پرسیدم	سریع پرسیدم	Direct/Literal
Asked incredulously	با تعجب	با ناباوری	با ناباوری	Direct/Literal
Asked unwisely	نادانسته پرسید	بی‌فکر پرسید	نابخردانه پرسید	Direct
Said prayerfully	با دعا گفتم	با دعا گفتم	با دعا گفتم	Direct/Literal
Said primly	با وقار گفت	با وقار گفت	با متانت گفت	Direct

As presented in Table 4, the majority of examples were translated according to direct/literal procedures, indicating that the AI systems were more concerned with replicating the lexical form of each adverb than with conveying its stylistic or emotive purpose. While a few items showed a tendency toward oblique translation (e.g., said cynically or asked unwisely), these remained isolated cases rather than general shifts. Overall, the AI systems proved insensitive to the subtle tone, evaluative attitude, and pragmatic specifics of speech-act manner adverbs. Consequently, the translations were grammatically correct but stylistically flat and less expressive than the original text.

Verbs describing attitudes or behavior are substantially modified by adverbs, which play a vital role in characterization, narrative rhythm, and the construction of emotional atmosphere. Rendering these in the target language requires more than mere semantic transfer; it demands stylistic awareness and contextual sensitivity to preserve their narrative impact. Although literal translations can preserve denotative meaning, they tend to weaken the color and aesthetic quality of the prose. Such instances would normally require oblique strategies, particularly modulation or equivalence; however, the AI systems in this study demonstrated a high propensity for word-to-word translation.

Table 5. Translation of Adverbs of Manner with Action Verbs

Source Text	OpenL Translate	QuillBot Translate	Google AI Studio	Strategy
Regarded coldly	با سردی	با سردی	با سردی	Direct/Literal
Grinned enormously	با لبخند بزرگی	با لبخندی بزرگ	لبخند گشادی زد	Direct
Shrugged elaborately	با دقت شانه بالا انداخت	به طور مفصل شانه بالا انداخت	با اغراق شانه بالا انداخت	Direct
Sat restlessly	بی‌قرار نشستم	بی‌قرار نشستم	بی‌قرار نشسته بودم	Direct/Literal
Maneuvered cautiously	به‌آرامی	با احتیاط	با احتیاط	Direct/Literal

The findings presented in Table 5 show that the AI systems relied primarily on direct/literal processes, with little attention to the expressive or stylistic roles of these manner adverbs. Even those instances that appeared to move toward a less artificial or more oblique rendering (e.g., grinned enormously or shrugged elaborately) were not extensive and seemed accidental rather than systematic. Taken together, the results confirm that the AI systems were unable to recreate the descriptive overtones, emotional shading, and narrative reverberation encoded by these adverbs in the original text. The translations were grammatically clean but lacked the stylistic richness necessary to sustain the literary effect of Jackson's story.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that the three AI-powered translation tools—Google AI Studio, Quill Bot, and OpenL Translate—primarily rely on direct translation strategies when rendering Shirley Jackson's short story *Charles* into Persian. Following Vinay and Darbelnet's (1985) model, two broad categories of strategies can be identified: direct translation (borrowing, calque, and literal translation) and oblique translation (transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation). The comparative analysis of idiomatic expressions, culture-specific items, and passive voice constructions demonstrates that the AI systems overwhelmingly favor direct methods, while the use of oblique

strategies is comparatively limited. With respect to idiomatic expressions (Table 1), most tools defaulted to literal renderings, such as “His father’s eyes widened” translated as « چشمان پدرش گشاد شد», which results in awkward and unidiomatic Persian phrasing. Only in a few cases, such as “He was fresh”, did the systems shift toward oblique strategies, producing equivalents like «او خیلی پررو بود» or «بی‌ادب بود» that better capture the contextual meaning. This tendency suggests that while the systems occasionally employ modulation or equivalence, they generally fail to account for the cultural and stylistic weight of idioms, leading to a loss of nuance and naturalness.

The treatment of culture-specific items (Table 2) further highlights the reliance on direct strategies. For example, the word “marshmallow” was consistently rendered as «کیک مارشمالو» by all three systems, an instance of direct borrowing that preserves the foreign term without cultural adaptation. Similarly, “kindergarten” was translated as either «مهدکودک» (literal equivalence) or «کودکستان» (adaptation). While these translations are functional, they lack sensitivity to the cultural connotations of the terms within the source context, underscoring the tools’ limitations in handling CSIs beyond lexical substitution.

In terms of grammatical structures such as the passive voice (Table 3), all three systems applied literal translation strategies, directly carrying over English passive constructions into Persian. For example, “The front door slamming open” was translated as «درب جلو به شدت باز شد» or « در ورودی با صدای بلندی باز شد». While grammatically correct, these constructions often sound unnatural in Persian, where the active voice is preferred.

The analysis of adverbs of manner in AI-powered literary translations revealed that current AI systems predominantly rely on direct or literal transfer procedures. Although such translations maintain grammatical accuracy, they fail to reproduce the stylistic nuances, emotional tone, and pragmatic intentions embedded in the source text.

The inability of the AI tools to restructure sentences according to Persian stylistic norms disrupts fluency and diminishes the narrative’s natural flow. Overall, the results demonstrate that AI-powered tools tend to prioritize surface-level lexical and syntactic accuracy at the expense of cultural, stylistic, and pragmatic appropriateness. Their preference for literal and borrowing strategies leads to translations that are often rigid, awkward, or culturally detached.

Although oblique methods such as equivalence and adaptation occasionally appear, they are not consistently applied and usually fail to capture the playful, idiomatic, and culturally embedded features of Jackson’s story. These findings highlight both the strengths of AI systems in producing fast and coherent literal translations and their limitations in recreating the nuanced, culturally informed strategies that human translators employ in literary translation.

6. Conclusion

The current research examined how three artificial intelligence systems translate the short story of *Charles* from English into Persian as a translation process with reference to the theoretical model of translation procedures developed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) as its theoretical basis. The study’s purpose was to define whether AI translators were based on direct or oblique approaches, and how the tendencies were indicative of the overall system behavior towards literary translation.

Translations generated with the help of Google AI Studio, Quill Bot Translate, and OpenL Translate were analyzed to outline the preference for a direct translation strategy, especially literal translation and calque. These techniques were employed widely in sentences with uncomplicated structure or clear meaning, and they generated grammatically correct but stylistically rigid Persian versions. Some cases of borrowing were also noted, and they were mainly used in dealing with proper names or cultural specific objects.

According to the findings, AI translations have shown significant improvements in preserving the surface accuracy, but still, they are not able to capture the deeper stylistic, emotional, and cultural strata that contribute to literary meaning. This limitation was also evident in the translation of adverbs of manner, where literal strategies predominated and stylistic nuance was frequently weakened. Such patterns highlight the difficulty AI systems face in conveying tone and expressive detail. Therefore, human involvement remains essential in literary translation.

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