



Cultural Mediation and Poetry Translation: A Comparative Study of Human and AI Translations

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Literary translation, particularly poetry translation, presents substantial methodological challenges that merit systematic examination. The question of translation equivalence becomes especially pronounced when transferring poetic works across linguistically and culturally disparate systems. This article empirically examines these challenges through analysis of specific case studies, focusing on cultural-linguistic transformations that occur during the translation process. The research evaluates both traditional translation practices and emerging technological approaches, comparing human translations with those produced with the assistance of artificial intelligence.

Multiple factors contribute to the complexity of translation in literary contexts. Positioned between languages and cultures, translators struggle to maintain authors' unique rhythm, tone, and stylistic fingerprint while making the text flow naturally in the new language. Language-specific phenomena present systematic challenges: diminutive forms in Russian and Spanish encode affective content that requires structural reconfiguration in English; cultural referents in languages such as Urdu or Japanese often lack equivalent conceptual frameworks in Western linguistic

systems; and rhetorical conventions deemed sophisticated in one literary tradition may be perceived as stylistically inappropriate in another. Additionally, formal poetic structures—such as rhyme schemes—carry different contemporary associations across cultural traditions, with implications for translation methodology. Poetry translation presents particular methodological difficulty when sound and semantic meaning function as an integrated unit rather than separable components. This integration necessitates significant interpretive intervention, positioning the translator as both an analytical reader and a creative co-author of the target text, or, as Basil Hatim and Ian Mason put it, receiver and producer (1).

This study examines four strategically selected translation cases exemplifying distinct challenges in poetry translation. The selection criteria were linguistic and cultural distance, historical significance, documented reception, and the availability of both human and AI translations.

Marina Tsvetaeva's translation of Federico García Lorca's "La guitarra" illustrates how Andalusian imagery interacts with Russian historical consciousness, necessitating the reconfiguration of culturally embedded metaphors. The Soviet translation of Raúl

González Tuñón's "Guitarreros de Catuna" reveals how Argentine historical references and performance traditions undergo a transformation when lacking recognition in the target culture. Evgeny Lukin's rendering of Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet" shows how an American soldier's confrontation with mortality becomes reframed through Russian Orthodox imagery and collective memory. Tatiana Karpechenko's translation of Olavo Bilac's "Outono" exemplifies a translator's choice of spatial reorientation and sensory adaptation of imagery when translating from Portuguese into Russian.

Together, these cases represent central translation challenges, including cultural symbolism, historical reference, philosophical framing, and sensory recalibration, which enable an analysis of how translators negotiate between semantic fidelity and cultural legibility across diverse contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSLATION AS CULTURAL NEGOTIATION

The field's central complexity is manifested in cultural mediation, the process of adapting content to bridge the cultural differences between source and target languages. This process occurs when transferring a poetic text from one national literature to another, with the translator assuming a double position as addressee and sender (Koster 149). It is nearly impossible for a professional to work from an objective position because literary translation involves replacing one text with another while interpreting and transferring meanings. As James S. Holmes emphasized, all translation is an act of critical interpretation (93). Therefore, it is an inherently partial process that influences the outcomes and final product, as it requires both the selective interpretation of the original text's essential meaning and adaptation to suit the target audience's needs (Widdowson 225). The act of translation is not a mere linguistic

transfer, but an act of communication across cultures (House 3). Within the context of this research, translation is seen as a cultural and interlingual negotiation. Operating within and shaped by cultural practice, translation is both a finished product and a process (Widdowson 224), as well as a cultural artifact (Venuti 172) that has ongoing cultural influence.

André Lefevere argued that translation was not a straightforward, neutral process, but rather a rewriting process that transforms texts as they are moved between cultures. In this framework, translators are not just technical language experts who convert words from one language to another. Instead, they are skilled, creative professionals who actively reshape texts through cultural choices and adjustments (Lefevere 36). Translators, like other rewriters, work within ideological, poetological, and patronage constraints (5, 31, 54). Ultimately, he argues that translation is not a neutral activity, but a politically significant cultural negotiation process often shaped by ideology and power dynamics.

Take, for example, Laura Saks' analysis of two translations of Polish author Bolesław Leśmian's poetry. This example is particularly illuminating because, according to Stanisław Barańczak (qtd. in Saks), Leśmian's poetry is a translator's nightmare, with some of his poems serving as overwhelming proof of the thesis of the untranslatability of poetry (285). Saks compares the translation of "Dwoje ludzieńków" into English by Alexandra Chciuk-Celt and Marian Polak-Chlabicz, highlighting the impact of different translation strategies. The title of the original in Polish means two people who lead an unhappy life, with the nuance of "ludzieńków" being based on an archaic dialectal diminutive form (Saks 286). Chciuk-Celt chooses to focus on accessibility and natural English flow. She produces a more approachable but formally simplified version of "Two humble humans," by

dropping the archaic and diminutive aspects of the title (Saks 289). Polak-Chlabicz, on the other hand, renders the title as “Two Poor Wights,” attempting to capture the meaning of the original through the use of an archaic English term. These contrasting approaches to a single text demonstrate how different translators may prioritize competing aspects of the source material.

The tension between preservation and adaptation can be evident in the work of a single translator employing different strategies, as seen in S. M. Fasiullah’s analysis of Muhammad Iqbal’s translations from English to Urdu. Iqbal prioritized accessibility over strict formal equivalence in his rendering of Mary Matilda Betham’s poem “A Child’s Hymn” into “Bacche Ki Dua.” He significantly altered metaphors and structure while trying to recreate the affective power of the original in the target language (Fasiullah 25). In the process, Iqbal reduced the text from twenty lines in the original to just twelve in his translation, adapting the poetic discourse to suit the different cultural sensitivities of the Urdu-speaking readers. In his translation of William Barnes’ “A Mother’s Dream” into “Maan Ka Khwab,” on the other hand, Iqbal took a markedly different approach, prioritizing literal fidelity while still maintaining poetic quality (Fasiullah 26).

As mentioned before, cultural and ideological motivations play a significant role in shaping individual choices at the linguistic and stylistic level, as well as in selecting which texts to translate. For example, English translations of Chinese poetry in the early twentieth century were influenced by post-World War I ideological shifts, during which Westerners sought Eastern wisdom to address their spiritual crises (Zhang 297-98). The dominant poetics of the time, particularly the Imagist movement, also influenced the translation of these poems. For instance, Witter Bynner, an American poet and translator, chose to use free verse rather than traditional Chinese

rhyming patterns to match contemporary Western literary tastes (Zhang 300). Patronage played a role as well, as shown in the case of James Legge’s translations, where the London Missionary Society had particular requirements and imposed restrictions about how these Chinese philosophical and religious texts should be presented in English. Translators have always had to work within those constraints, ensuring their final product conforms to their target audience’s ideological, poetic, and institutional demands (Zhang 300).

While the previous examples primarily illustrate ideological, poetic, and patronage constraints, the formal aspects of poetry translation demand equal attention. Translators must navigate the complex interplay of linguistic elements that carry cultural meaning beyond semantic content. The phonetic dimension of poetry presents a particularly rich space where cultural and linguistic aspects converge in translation practice, thereby extending the theoretical framework to encompass the sensory components of poetic language. This perspective enables a consideration of phonetics in poetry translation that goes beyond traditional form-versus-content dichotomies.

For example, phonemes may function as meaning-bearing units, creating a cognitive bridge between sound and meaning, a perceptual phenomenon linking sound patterns to mental imagery (Sviridova 39). The translator’s challenge is preserving the phonological elements, such as alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and their corresponding imagery systems. Sviridova illustrates this through two illuminating case studies: translations of the imagist poem “Oread” by Hilda Doolittle, and several poems by E. E. Cummings. In the case of the first one, Russian translators attempted to maintain distinctive sound patterns, such as the alliteration of /r/, /p/, and /s/ sounds, which create auditory images of stormy waters (Sviridova 40). In the second, the

translator attempted to preserve both spatial arrangement and phonetic qualities in Russian versions of several experimentally avant-garde poems that express loneliness through fragmented imagery (Sviridova 41). Sviridova's approach integrates cognitive, pragmatic, and synergistic approaches to poetry translation. It suggests that effective translation requires a process that tracks connections between sound and sensation to maintain the delicate interplay between phonetic structure and semantic projection. Her analysis illustrates the difficulties translators face in preserving both the musicality and the meaning of poems across languages.

CHALLENGES IN CROSS-CULTURAL POETRY TRANSLATION

Successful translations that overcome challenges serve as practical examples, offering valuable insights that support both theoretical perspectives and practical case studies. An additional benefit can be derived from considering a review of translation cases recognized as problematic by researchers. It enables us to understand further the boundaries translators need to establish when rendering texts across languages and cultures, particularly in light of the theoretical framework of cultural negotiation and its constraints. A critical analysis of specific challenges and missed opportunities in the English translation of Daagh Dehlvi's poetry in Urdu, for example, reveals the tension between cultural specificity and target language accessibility that has been identified as central to translation decision-making.

According to Memoona Manzoor et al., the first difficulty in translating poetry from Urdu to English has to do with the fact that many culturally specific words and concepts, such as "visal," "ajab," and "yaar," do not have direct English equivalents (6721). These terms carry meaningful connotations in Urdu culture, and their

omission or substitution in the target language substantially affects the poem's message. The authors note that the phonetic and metrical qualities of the original and the translation were not equivalent, as the translator did not maintain the consistent rhyme scheme and did not reproduce the stressed syllable patterns that gave the Urdu version its musical quality.

Additionally, the structural patterns of the Urdu poem had to be reorganized, losing some of the elegance of the original, and often requiring more words in English to convey what was concise in Urdu. The translator seemed to struggle with negotiating syntactic differences between the English and Urdu languages, and, in Manzoor et al.'s opinion, the translation failed to convey the full resonance of Dehlvi's discourse, which is deeply embedded in Urdu literary and cultural traditions. While the basic semantic meaning was often preserved, the translation ultimately emerged as more prosaic and lost much of the original's poetic artistry and cultural essence (Manzoor et al. 6717).

Translators have faced the challenge of preserving the cultural resonance of original texts and maintaining a balance between form and meaning for centuries. Recent technological developments, particularly in artificial intelligence and machine learning, have proven to be more effective in standardizing translation practices in areas such as life sciences (Casey et al. 1427-28). Yet, in spite of AI-based tools promising to enhance translation work, the decision-making process still requires human intervention when cultural interpretation is needed. The following comparative analyses demonstrate how different translators approach the challenges of preserving poetic meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. These examples focus on the linguistic, cultural, and ideological factors that influence the translation of poetry in different cultural contexts. They help illuminate where AI can assist the translation

process and where human cultural knowledge and artistic sensitivity remain essential.

CULTURAL REIMAGINING: TSVETAEVA'S TRANSFORMATION OF LORCA'S "LA GUITARRA"

Let's consider the translation of Federico García Lorca's poem "La guitarra" ("Guitar") by one of the most important poets of the Russian Silver Age, Marina Tsvetaeva.¹ Lorca wrote "La guitarra" as part of his collection *Poema del Cante Jondo* (*Poem of the Deep Song*), published in 1931. The poem emerges from the specific cultural context of Andalusian flamenco tradition, embodying Lorca's meditation on human suffering and loss. A personified Spanish guitar becomes the vessel for expressing the emotional anguish central to Andalusian flamenco culture and the universal human condition. The poem structurally mirrors flamenco's repetitive, haunting rhythms using rich imagery to create an expression of human sorrow.

Lorca was arrested in the early days of the Spanish Civil War and shot without trial in 1936, targeted for his liberal politics, homosexuality, and cultural prominence. Marina Tsvetaeva translated the poem five years after Lorca's execution by Nationalist forces and a couple of months before her suicide in 1941.

As we compare the two versions, it becomes clear that Tsvetaeva's rendering of Lorca's "La guitarra" into Russian represents far more than a linguistic conversion. The translation embodies a cultural reimagining that transforms Spanish poetic sensibilities into a distinctly Russian emotional landscape. Tsvetaeva's strategic adaptations begin with geography and flora. By reconfiguring Lorca's "Arena del Sur caliente / que pide camelias blancas" ("the

hot southern sands yearn for white camellias") into "Так песок раскаленный плачет / о прохладной красе камелий" ("thus the scorching sand weeps for the cool beauty of camellias"), Tsvetaeva acknowledges the disconnect Russian readers would feel with specifically Andalusian imagery. The Mediterranean landscape, so intrinsic to Spanish poetic imagination, finds little resonance in Russian cultural memory, where camellias are exotic foreign flowers. Instead, Tsvetaeva repositions these elements, creating space for imagery that speaks more directly to Russian sensibilities by focusing on the temperature contrast rather than the flowers themselves.

A significant intervention comes with the introduction of "Так плачет закат о рассвете" ("the sunset weeps about/in anticipation of dawn") in the Russian version. In the original, Lorca employs the temporal markers "tarde" ("afternoon") and "mañana" ("morning") to denote specific periods of the day, emphasizing absence or loss. This effect extends the metaphor of an arrow crying "sin blanco" ("without target/mark"), divested of its essential purpose. Tsvetaeva's translation, by contrast, shifts to "закат" ("sunset") and "рассвете" ("dawn"), terms that foreground the transitional movements of light rather than static temporal divisions. The shift is seemingly subtle, yet it carries an extraordinary weight in Russian historical consciousness. The poetic image of sunset weeping in anticipation of dawn, the typical timing of executions, resonates with the collective trauma experienced by the people during the Russian Civil War, as well as during the periods of Red and Great Terror, in 1918–1922 and 1936–1938, respectively.

Tsvetaeva's addition of a snake as a symbolic element in the verses "Так прощается с жизнью птица / Под угрозой змеиного жала" ("So a bird bids farewell to

¹ All English translations of the Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese originals and translated versions are mine. These are literal translations intended to

demonstrate translating strategies, human or AI, rather than to create polished English poetry.

life / Under the threat of a serpent's sting") transforms Lorca's imagery significantly. Where the Spanish author simply notes "el primer pájaro muerto / sobre la rama" ("the first dead bird on the branch"), Tsvetaeva creates an explicit scene of menace and imminent violence. This transformation from a static image of death to a dynamic scene of predatory threat evokes the fascist violence that claimed Lorca's life, while simultaneously reflecting the desperation and danger that the translator herself endured during Stalinist oppression (Obolenskaia 103). The snake imagery intimates a reference to Stalinist purges, in which poets and writers faced torture and execution, a reality Tsvetaeva knew intimately, having lost many friends, witnessed her husband's execution, and seen her daughter arrested and sent to a forced labor camp. In the Russian version, the snake threatening the bird establishes a reference to fatality and victimhood as outcomes of predation, elements absent from Lorca's original. Such a transformation introduces a dynamic of political menace that would resonate profoundly with Russian readers who had lived through revolution, civil war, and Stalinist purges.

The poem's final metaphor, Lorca's "Corazón malherido por cinco espadas" ("Heart mortally wounded by five swords"), positions the listener's heart as the recipient of music's emotional impact, with the guitar player's five fingers metaphorically represented as noble swords. The metaphor creates an intimate triangulation between the performer, the instrument, and the audience, with music functioning as a dignified weapon that wounds in an almost sacred manner. Beyond its literal meaning, the Spanish term "espadas" carries cultural connotations of honor, directness, and formal combat.

Tsvetaeva fundamentally reconfigures this metaphorical dynamic by referring to the guitar as "Бедная жертва пяти проворных кинжалов" ("Poor victim of five

nimble/deft daggers"), which shifts focus from human listeners and music's impact on them to the guitar itself being victimized. By transforming swords into daggers, she introduces stealth and violation absent in the original, and suggests skillful manipulation that further alters the power dynamics. Crucially, where Lorca's guitar *becomes* the emotional core itself—a wounded heart pierced by noble swords that transmits raw feeling through music—Tsvetaeva's use of the word "victim" creates more distance, positioning readers as compassionate observers of personified suffering rather than direct recipients of emotional transmission. This vocabulary choice aligns with Russian poetic tradition, where musical instruments appear as suffering entities themselves, embodying existential despair or societal trauma rather than merely serving as conduits. In Ivan K. Ozerov's *Песни бездомного* (*The Songs of the Homeless*), for example, a violin is personified in that manner: "Скрипка словно сердце мое, плачет, поет, смеется, рыдает" ("the violin, like my heart, weeps, sings, laughs, and sobs") (68).

If we consider the circumstances of Lorca's arrest and execution, the choice to replace noble swords with treacherous daggers and to reframe the guitar as a victim rather than a conduit may refer to the fact that he was betrayed while hiding at his friend's home (Obolenskaia 103). Tsvetaeva does not merely build a linguistic bridge but also engages in a political act of commemoration for a fellow poet silenced by authoritarian violence. Through these transformations, Tsvetaeva does not simply translate Lorca; she recreates his lament in a form that speaks directly to her contemporaries in Russia.

The value of the human approach becomes more evident when contrasted with how contemporary artificial intelligence might translate the same poem. Where Tsvetaeva makes bold, culturally informed decisions to reimagine Lorca's work for

Russian sensibilities, AI translation, despite its technical sophistication, produces a more semantically accurate but culturally flattened version.

AI software prioritizes literal precision, maintaining the original structure and metaphorical relationships of Lorca's Spanish text. Both the July 2024 and August 2025 versions of Claude AI produced identical translations of the poem, which preserve the imagery of hot southern sands yearning for white camellias without considering whether this resonates with Russian readers ("Translate 'La guitarra,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). The translation by AI makes a direct translation of Lorca's "el primer pájaro muerto sobre la rama" as "the first dead bird on the branch" ("Translate 'La guitarra,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). This version maintains the image of the heart wounded by five swords without recognizing the different cultural connotations that swords versus daggers might carry across these distinct traditions ("Translate 'La guitarra,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). Most critically, AI does not independently introduce culturally specific imagery absent in the original, despite such additions possibly being helpful to the target audience, such as the associations of dawn with executions or the predatory threat of the snake.

The fundamental limitation of AI translation lies not in technical accuracy but in the lack of cultural intuition, the inability to recognize when semantic fidelity should yield to emotional resonance within the target culture. Tsvetaeva's translation succeeds precisely because she exercises this intuition, knowing when creative betrayal of the original text becomes a valid form of fidelity.

The comparison between human and AI renderings illuminates the essence of literary translation as a profound act of cultural negotiation. Tsvetaeva's deviations from Lorca's original text—her reordering, adaptations, and cultural transformations—

paradoxically achieve a deeper fidelity to the poem's emotional core for her Russian audience than any technically perfect but culturally remote translation could accomplish. Her work stands as a testament to translation as creative reimagining, a practice that even the most advanced artificial intelligence cannot fully replicate without the lived cultural experience and poetic intuition that inform human translators' most inspired choices.

IDEOLOGICAL ADAPTATION: SOVIET TRANSLATION OF RAÚL GONZÁLEZ TUÑÓN'S "GUITARREROS DE CATUNA"

Introducing such significant changes in the translation process is not the exclusive privilege of renowned poets; even those who are trained professionals and not poets by trade employ similar practices. For example, take a Russian translation of Argentine Raúl González Tuñón's "Guitarreros de Catuna," published in Moscow's *Foreign Literature Journal* in 1960. The translation originates from a period when Soviet cultural institutions actively engaged with Latin American authors who sympathized with communist ideology. Soviet translators were assigned the task of either passing them through a socialist lens or eliminating what did not align with the official Communist Party ideology (Selimov 41).

The original text in Spanish captures a distinctly Argentine cultural tradition known as a *guitarreada* or *payada*, a competitive musical performance featuring two guitarists engaging in an improvisational duel to demonstrate their artistic mastery. In telling its story, the poem relies on historical references and cultural traditions familiar to Argentine readers. González Tuñón deliberately named the dueling musicians after two legendary nineteenth-century military leaders, drawing a parallel between the competitive spirit of the musical duel and Argentina's

combative political history. Ángel Vicente Peñaloza (El Chacho) and Facundo Quiroga were more than just military commanders; they were associated with a distinctly Argentine perception of rural masculinity, embodying gaucho values, freedom, and bravery. As supporters of the federal system, they opposed Unitarian adoption of European political liberalism and economic policies, particularly those that threatened provincial autonomy and traditional Catholic values.

The Russian translation reconceptualizes the scene entirely, making several significant alterations that reflect the challenges of translating culturally specific historical references and the translator's adaptive response. The translator eliminated the references to Peñaloza and Quiroga, presenting a more romanticized and melancholic scene of two guitarists from Catuna playing under the moon. This was done for two interconnected reasons. First, as Selimov (43) notes, there was a political motivation to avoid mentioning historically complex figures that might conflict with Soviet interpretations of Latin American history. Second, these commanders would have been entirely unfamiliar to Soviet readers, making their inclusion potentially confusing. Rather than searching for comparable figures in Soviet history, which might have introduced unwanted political parallels, the translator completely reimagines the scene. He transforms it through the familiar lens of Russian cultural tropes about drunken friendship, making the work more accessible to the audience.

The strings are described as “рыдают” (“weep/sob”), the musicians gaze “нежно” (“tenderly”) at one another, and their music evokes “дрожь по коже” (“shivers/trembling on the skin”), creating an atmospheric, emotionally charged musical performance. Note the personification of the guitar, which comes from the previously discussed Lorca poem. The crying strings image was familiar in the

USSR because Lorca's work had achieved considerable popularity due to official support for the political left during the Spanish Civil War. Lorca's emotionally rich imagery had become a standardized approach for presenting Spanish-language poetry to Soviet readers, influencing the translation of works by other authors. The two additional elements, which are absent from the original, are the music's powerful emotional effect on the invisible audience and the sentimental connection between the two guitar players. While these additions contradict the masculine competitive spirit of the Argentine *guitarreada*, they align with the recurring literary motif of drinking brotherhood. The cultural trope of sentimental male bonding through alcohol appears throughout Russian literature. The use of the diminutive “пьянчуга” (“drunkard”) rather than the more direct “пьяный” (“drunk”) creates a more affectionate, almost endearing quality in the tone of the original poem, making it familiar to Russian readers through an approach that prioritizes cultural accessibility over fidelity to the original's masculine competitive ethos.

When translating the poem with the assistance of Claude AI, the result is a direct transfer of the meaning without cultural mediation. While the resulting text maintains the literal meaning, the other elements, such as the rhythm, rhyme, and poetic qualities of the original, are no longer present. One of the strongest aspects of the poem is kept: the reference to the legendary commanders in presenting the guitar players. However, its significance and connection to the Argentine identity are lost, even for educated Soviet readers with knowledge of history. The names of El Chacho and Quiroga powerfully resonate with Argentine readers, but hold no emotional value within Russian cultural memory. The outcome is a translation that remains textually true to the source, but does not accurately convey the original idea.

REFRAMING MORTALITY: LUKIN'S ORTHODOX READING OF TURNER'S "HERE, BULLET"

The tension between literal translation and cultural adaptation is not unique to Spanish-Russian translations. Cultural assumptions fundamentally shape how poetry resonates across languages, as demonstrated in another striking example: the Russian translation of American poet Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet." This contemporary war poem, written during the Iraq War, undergoes a significant transformation when adapted for Russian readers. It is evident in the title itself. The Russian version uses "сюда" ("to here") instead of just "здесь" ("here"), which emphasizes movement toward a destination. This creates an active, directional appeal towards the bullet, rather than just identifying the soldier's position. This spatial command sets up the confrontational tone that characterizes the Russian version. It reflects different cultures' assumptions about military narrative.

Turner's original poem presents a soldier facing mortality and contains a contemplative philosophical reflection. The translation, however, reconstructs this voice through the lens of Russian cultural expectations, transforming him into an action hero while simultaneously infusing him with Eastern Orthodox overtones. The result is a fascinating dual transformation that speaks to both Russia's perception of American military character and its own cultural traditions.

Consider the lines where the speaker addresses the bullet directly: "And I dare you to finish / what you've started" (Turner). It is an invitation; the speaker is actively encouraging the bullet to complete its deadly work. It is almost collaborative, as if declaring, "Go ahead, I'm ready." The Russian translation rephrases the line, changing the essence of the soldier's

perspective of the bullet, converting it into a more competitive stance. The lines, "И держу пари, ты не закончишь то, / что начала" ("and I bet you will not finish what you started") (Lukin), suggest the speaker will beat the bullet to the punch, seizing control of the narrative. The shift from "dare" to "bet" transforms an enabling challenge into an adversarial wager, converting the speaker's collaborative fatalism into competitive resistance. As a result, the poem's philosophical meditation on mortality becomes a visceral, intimate confrontation with finality.

This shift does more than reflect Russian expectations of American soldiers' perspective as bravado. It reframes the entire spiritual and philosophical framework of the soldier's encounter with death by introducing an element of personal, physical agency in the face of mortality. Turner's original perspective emerges from an American post-Vietnam poetic tradition where philosophical meditation on mortality and agency predominates. The speaker approaches death not as an adversary but as an interlocutor, suggesting a collaborative relationship between soldier and fate. The original text seeks to complete the bullet's meaning through poetic contemplation, suggesting a search for transcendent understanding: "Because here, bullet / here is where I complete the word you bring" (Turner). Completion is not just physical—the bullet finding its target—but also semantic and existential. The soldier sees himself holding the power to give meaning to the bullet's purpose. He becomes a co-creator, thoughtfully providing the missing piece that makes the bullet's word whole.

The Russian version reframes Turner's poem to resonate within a literary context where Turner's contemplative stance might otherwise appear passive to readers accustomed to more combative approaches to mortality: "Потому что здесь, пуля, / именно здесь я покончу со словом, что ты несешь" ("Because here, bullet, / right

here I will finish off the word that you carry") (Lukin). The choice of the verb "finish off" implies forceful annihilation; it is more violent, more final, less thoughtful. This transformation reveals how deeply cultural frameworks shape not just language but also the conceptualization of mortality itself. Where American poetic tradition positions the soldier as a meaning-maker engaged in philosophical completion, Russian literary sensibility demands active confrontation even in the moment of potential annihilation. The choice of "покончить" ("finish off") rather than "завершить" ("complete") serves a critical function in this context: it heightens the dramatic tension through its suggestions of close combat, shifts the philosophical framework from integration to confrontation, and places the poem within a literary tradition where mortality must be met with decisive personal action rather than gradual philosophical realization.

The translation's handling of the poem's most intimate moment is even more revealing. The lines "here is where I moan the barrel's cold esophagus, / triggering my tongue's explosives" (Turner), which in English suggest both vulnerability and agency, undergo a striking cultural and religious transformation in Russian: "именно здесь я успею отпеть / холодный пищевод ствола, спустив / курок своего языка среди винтовых нарезов" ("here is where I will succeed finishing the chanting / of the barrel's cold esophagus/ by pulling the trigger of my tongue") (Lukin).

The verb "moan" used in the original creates a disturbing juxtaposition between intimate human sounds/actions and a weapon's cold, deadly nature, making the imagery more powerful and unsettling through a visceral, physical sense of interaction. The poet states the human reaction to the bullet's impact on the soldier's body.

The translator chooses to render "moan" as the Russian word "отпеть," a verb that

refers to performing a funeral service or requiem in the Orthodox Christian tradition. It means to sing over or to complete the singing of prayers. This vocabulary choice changes the intended meaning of the original because the readers will unavoidably interpret it in the context of Orthodox funeral rites, which have deep roots in Russian society, even among its non-religious members. The ritual represents not just a formal farewell to the deceased but also a communal act that bridges the physical and spiritual worlds. Through cultural mediation, an individual soldier's experience becomes a part of a communal ritual within the Russian cultural context.

The translation choice reflects fundamentally different cultural approaches to military experience. American military literature often emphasizes individual psychological experience, shaped by Vietnam War literature and post-traumatic narrative traditions. Russian military literature, on the other hand, tends to frame combat experience within broader cultural and historical contexts, viewing the soldier's experience in the context of the collective memory and shared spiritual traditions of the society. The soldier's voice becomes part of a centuries-old chorus of communal remembrance and meaning-making, rather than an isolated cry of personal contemplation.

As in the two previously analyzed Russian versions of Spanish poems, this case reveals a consistent pattern in cross-cultural translation that extends far beyond simple linguistic transformation. At the formal level, we observe the introduction of culturally familiar elements to facilitate comprehension, the adjustment of tone to align with readers' expectations from another culture, and the recasting of perspectives through local cultural lenses.

This cultural mediation becomes particularly visible when contrasted with AI translation, which consistently produces literal renderings that remain faithful to the

verbal meaning of the original poem. For example, Turner's "I dare you" is translated as "я бросаю тебе вызов" ("I throw you a challenge") rather than "держу пари" ("I bet") used in Lukin's translation ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*). This distinction highlights a key contrast: the AI translations emphasize the challenge itself, aligning closely with the original text's intent, whereas Lukin's translation reorients the reader's focus toward the soldier's attitude, portraying him as more fearless and dismissive of danger, as if his life were a mere game of chance.

Among other differences, the AI's translation of the word "complete" as "завершу" ("to complete or bring to fulfillment") rather than "покончу" ("to finish off or put an end to") maintains the original's sense of purposeful fulfillment rather than simple termination ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*). The AI version focuses on the completion of a mission or destiny rather than death, thus preserving the original poem's vision.

The poem starts with a soldier addressing the bullet: "If a body is what you want" (Turner). AI translates the verb "want" with the direct equivalent "хочешь" ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*). The human translation, in contrast, heightens the personification of the bullet with "алчешь" ("you crave hungrily/desperately") (Lukin) to set the stage for a more competitive type of confrontation that takes place in the Russian version.

The soldier continues addressing bullet in the second stanza, and the reference to "the clavicle-snapped wish" (Turner) presents a complex translation challenge that reveals fundamental interpretive differences. Turner's compound construction creates deliberate ambiguity about agency: is the wish snapped by the clavicle, or is the clavicle snapped, modifying the nature of the wish? The AI

translation, "желание, щелкнувшее ключицей" ("the wish that snapped the clavicle") ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*) and "желание, сломавшее ключицу" ("the wish that broke the clavicle") ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *ChatGPT*), resolve this ambiguity by making the wish the active agent, maintaining the anatomical precision and violent suddenness of the original action. Significantly, the sharp consonant cluster ending in a lower-pitched hushing sibilant "sh" in Turner's "clavicle-snapped wish" creates an onomatopoeic effect where one can almost hear the bone breaking and bullet flying, which the Russian "щелкнувшее" preserves through its sharp "щ" [sh] and "кн" [kn] sounds. Both AI versions maintain Turner's metaphysical compression through participial constructions, preserving how the wish and the snapping occur in the same instant. The phrase "Clavicle-snapped wish" was translated as "желание, щелкнувшее ключицей," meaning literally "the wish that snapped the clavicle" ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*), and alternatively as "желание, сломавшее ключицу," meaning "the wish that broke the clavicle" ("Translate 'Here Bullet,'" *ChatGPT*). Both AI versions restructure the English compound phrase while maintaining the anatomical precision and violent suddenness of the original action.

Lukin's translation, however, transforms this image entirely into "предмет твоих желаний - сломанная ключица" ("the object of your desires - a broken collarbone"), representing significant interpretive intervention on multiple levels. First, Lukin eliminates agency altogether, presenting a static result ("сломанная ключица") rather than a dynamic breaking, losing the temporal fusion Turner captures. The phrase "предмет твоих желаний" separates and explicates what Turner fuses, adding interpretive distance between the bullet's desire and the body's breaking. Most significantly, by attributing "desires"

directly to the bullet through the possessive “твоих” (“your”), Lukin introduces a layer of personification absent from the original, transforming the projectile from an addressed object into a desiring subject with its own emotional drives. This sonic immediacy is also lost in Lukin’s “сломанная,” which lacks the acoustic violence of the original. Through these changes, Lukin domesticates Turner’s disturbing fusion of volition and violence into a more conventional poetic trope of desire and its object, fundamentally altering the poem’s philosophical stance.

A crucial difference emerges in the AI translation of the term “moan” and the subsequent imagery. The verb is rendered as “простону” (“I will moan”), maintaining the original’s secular, physical, and personal nature of the interaction with death (“Translate ‘Here Bullet,’” Claude *Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). The future tense suggests the immediacy of the encounter between the body and the bullet, as implied in the original, and avoids the religious overtones that appear in the culturally mediated human translation.

The ending reveals fundamentally different interpretive approaches. The human translation of “неминуемо кончается мир” (“the world inevitably ends”) introduces a sense of fatality and inescapable destiny absent from Turner’s original. The AI’s “мир заканчивается, каждый раз” (“the world ends, every time”) simply states that each bullet represents an ending, preserving the repetitive, experiential nature of Turner’s vision where each death is both singular and iterative, a repeated trauma of war rather than a cosmic inevitability.

Throughout, we can see how the human translation actively works to make this American poem more accessible to Russian readers by incorporating cultural and religious elements familiar to them, while the AI translation endeavors to maintain a more literal presentation of Turner’s military

experience in the Russian language. This raises the following question in translation practice: how far can translators go in adapting an original work to the cultural expectations of the readers of translated poetry? Should they prioritize the preservation of the original, forcing readers to make an extra effort to understand a different cultural perspective? While some might question the poetic quality of the AI translation, we cannot overlook that, in this case, it preserves Turner’s unique voice as an American soldier-poet rather than recasting him in a Russian mold.

SPATIAL REORIENTATION: KARPECHENKO'S CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF BILAC'S "OUTONO"

The dilemma of every translation is the choice between adapting the poem to the target language’s cultural context or allowing readers to encounter a culturally different perspective, which may be less familiar but is perhaps truer to the original’s intent and cultural context. While AI’s literal approach has demonstrated value in preserving linguistic equivalence, the complexity of this choice becomes evident when examining cases where cultural adaptation proves essential. For example, Tatiana Karpechenko’s translation of Brazilian poet Olavo Bilac’s “Outono” illuminates the complex choices that define successful poetry translation. Karpechenko published her notes online, explaining the rationale for her decisions and linguistic choices, which provided additional material for our analysis.

When comparing the AI translation and Karpechenko’s version, several important differences appear. Karpechenko’s work demonstrates a sophisticated decision-making process that goes far beyond word-for-word translation. For example, the Portuguese original uses “mar,” meaning “sea” in the first line, which is translated as “океан” (“ocean”) (Karpechenko, “Brazilskii

sonnet"). This choice has deep roots in Portugal's maritime heritage. It is part of a term "volta do mar" ("turn of the sea"), a sailing technique referring to a return maneuver from islands in the Atlantic Ocean. In her published translator's notes, Karpechenko explains that Portuguese speakers worldwide refer to the ocean as "mar" ("sea"), a usage dating back to the Age of Great Geographical Discoveries when oceanic expanses became part of everyday life for Portuguese explorers and later Brazilians ("Byl Parusnik"). When translating for a Russian audience, Karpechenko makes the informed decision to use the term "океан" ("ocean") instead of "море" ("sea"). Rather than preserving a historical perception rooted in Portuguese and Brazilian culture, she makes a linguistic choice which reflects Russians' geographical conceptualization of large bodies of water ("Brazilskii Sonet"). Later in the poem, Karpechenko uses the term "море" ("sea") when the original describes the "mar inabitado e morto" ("uninhabited and dead sea"), suggesting that context and poetic effect guide her choices rather than mechanical substitution. When the Portuguese text itself shifts to "ocean," she maintains this with "океан" ("ocean"), showing attention to the author's own lexical variations ("Brazilskii Sonet"). The AI-translated version offers a literal translation devoid of cultural mediation.

Even more revealing is the translator's handling of spatial relationships when translating Portuguese "sobre" ("above") to Russian "Внизу" ("below"). Bilac's original verse "Sobre o jardim calado, e as águas miro, absorto" ("Above the silent garden, I gaze at the waters, absorbed") is translated as: "Внизу молчит мой сад, а я воде внимаю" ("Below, my garden lies silent, while I heed the waters' call") (Karpechenko, "Brazilskii Sonet"). Where the Portuguese original positions the observer above the garden, the Russian translation shifts the viewpoint to the garden below.

Karpechenko explains that the key is conveying the image: windows open above the silent garden, while below the garden is quiet, maintaining the spatial logic in both versions without confusion about upper and lower levels ("Byl Parusnik"). This transformation demonstrates the human translator's aesthetic judgment in selecting the viewpoint that best serves the poem's artistic goals. While the AI translation maintains a literal perspective, Karpechenko's solution creates better flow with a sequential perspective: making three visual stops through windows, the garden, and water, each with its own perceptive autonomy.

This reorientation emphasizes the poet's elevated position, thus elevating his connection to the ocean. While this may be considered a deviation from the original's strict perspective, it creates a powerful effect in the Russian translation. Such an approach requires not only linguistic knowledge but also artistic sensitivity, which we were unable to replicate through either of the AI translation systems available at the time of this study.

The translation becomes even more focused in its handling of verbs, particularly in distinguishing between "mirar" and "olhar," both meaning to look. Karpechenko notes that "mirar" is more Spanish than Portuguese, with "olhar" being the Portuguese equivalent. She suggests Bilac chose "miro" for its less common, more aristocratic quality, reserving the colloquial "olho" for the sonnet's twelfth line, the denouement ("Byl Parusnik"). While AI programs consistently translate "mirar" as a simple equivalent of the verb "to look," ("Translate 'Outono,'" *Claude Sonnet-3.5; Claude Opus 4.1*), the translator chooses the verb "внимаю" ("heed") for the phrase "miro, absorto." This verb contains sufficient concentration and avoids the literal translation of "absorto," which, as the translator recognizes, could misleadingly suggest the hero had drowned. Karpechenko

acknowledges this shift from visual to auditory perception but argues that since the poem is already heavily visual, adding auditory sensations enriches it (“Byl Parusnik”).

This pattern of culturally informed adaptation continues throughout the translation. The original speaks of abstract concepts such as “Viuvez, velhice, desconforto,” which AI translates literally as “widowhood, old age, and discomfort” (“Translate ‘Outono,’” *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). Karpechenko changes the perspective by having the poetic voice speak in the first person: “I endure, lose, melt away,” creating a more active rhythm with verbs and a more immediate emotional expression. She also replaces nouns with verbs that at first appear unrelated to the original “терплю, теряю, таю” (“I endure, lose, melt away”) (“Byl Parusnik”). Where Bilac lists sensations “as if counting fallen leaves one by one,” Karpechenko presents phonetically similar verbs that embody “the very flight of leaves downward” (“Byl Parusnik”). She justifies each verb choice through careful semantic analysis. For example, the use of “дискомфорт” (“discomfort”) as the translation for “desconforto,” (“discomfort”), in the translator’s opinion, would transform the “confused, refined poet into an insensitive snob” who merely issues orders to ensure his comfortable life. Instead, the choice falls on “терплю” (“I endure”), noting that discomfort is something one endures (Karpechenko, “Byl Parusnik”). For “viuvez” (“widowhood”), the translator avoids the literal transfer of the meaning considering it could confuse readers since Bilac was a bachelor, and chose “теряю” (“lose”) to express the feeling of loss (Karpechenko, “Byl Parusnik”). Similarly, “velhice” (“old age”) becomes “таю” (“melt away”) because, as she notes, at 53 years old (and especially when younger), one feels the process of aging rather than old age as a final state (Karpechenko, “Byl Parusnik”).

The translator’s approach to prosodic elements reveals another dimension of human translation artistry. According to Karpechenko, Bilac creates a significant rhythmic disruption in the third line of the first tercet, when addressing a ship. “Mas chegaste com a noite, e fugiste com o sol!” which AI translates literally as “But you arrived with the night, and fled with the sun” (“Translate ‘Outono,’” *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*). Karpechenko identifies this as a deliberate sound effect: the Portuguese words “chegaste, noite, fugiste” (pronounced “shegásti, nóitchi, fuzhíshti”) create an onomatopoeic representation of “the ship turning! Spinning like a multifaceted crystal in the port! Even creaking!” (Karpechenko, “Byl Parusnik”). However, she consciously chose not to replicate this rhythmic disruption in Russian, explaining that her audience would perceive it as a defect rather than a deliberate artistic choice (“Byl Parusnik”). Instead of mimicking the original’s prosodic acrobatics, she opts for the simple solution: “Ты вечером пришёл – к утру тебя уж нет” (“You came in the evening – by morning you were already gone”). As she notes, incorporating sound-play into a metrically broken line might work in a Portuguese sonnet as “an extreme case” where the poem still retains its beauty, but “in Russian – absolutely not” (“Byl Parusnik”). The solution prioritizes rhythmic integrity, and as the translator states: “Better to skip a word than break the rhythm” (“Byl Parusnik”).

The translator’s meticulous process balances sound and meaning. For the verb describing dawn’s interaction with the departing ship, Karpechenko weighed three options: “облил” (“doused”), “плеснул” (“splashed”), and “омыл” (“washed”). She rejected “doused” as too aggressive – “dawn wasn’t actually intending to take revenge on the escaping ship and maliciously douse it with sunbeams in pursuit!” “Splashed” felt too sharp, since “while a ship can come and go as quickly as it wants, it is remembered

for a long time, and the verb here needs to be picturesque and slow the action.” Her final choice, “омыл” (“washed”), creates a lingering, painterly effect that honors the poem’s visual nature while adding temporal depth—something AI translations miss when they maintain literal references to “sunset glow” without considering cultural and aesthetic dimensions.

Even color imagery undergoes cultural adaptation through careful consideration of cultural contexts. The final image transforms “clarão nascente do arrebol,” translated literally by AI as “nascent gleam of the sunset glow” (“Translate ‘Outono,’” *Claude Sonnet-3.5*; *Claude Opus 4.1*), into “румяным золотом” (“ruddy gold”). This color combination has an immediate evocative quality in Russian culture, suggesting vitality and warmth. Karpechenko deliberately adapts the imagery to Russian sensibilities, evoking the “flush like cheeks from the frost” to establish an affective connection with the target audience, rather than maintaining Brazil’s tropical setting (“Byl Parusnik”).

CONCLUSION

The case studies examined in this article reveal consistent patterns in poetry rendering that extend beyond mere linguistic conversion. Through close analysis of English, Spanish, and Portuguese translations into Russian, we have observed how human translators engage in sophisticated negotiation, transforming texts to resonate within Russian literary frameworks. Such transformations are not flaws or deviations from linguistic equivalence, but instead represent an effective translation practice—the art of recreating a poem’s emotional core within a new context.

These patterns challenge conventional metrics of translation quality, suggesting that fidelity itself requires redefinition—not as adherence to surface features but as

preservation of a poem’s capacity to move readers across cultural boundaries. They indicate that translation functions more as a dialogue than as a technical linguistic equivalence. The examples correspond with Lefevere’s concept of translation as rewriting, with translators serving not as neutral conduits but as active mediators working within constraints of ideology, poetics, and patronage. Historical contexts—whether during Stalin’s Great Terror or the Soviet Union’s engagement with Latin American literature—indicate how political circumstances shape translation and often serve as a means for negotiating ideological tensions.

Compared with artificial intelligence translations of the same poems, the human versions highlight the distinction between semantic accuracy and emotional resonance. While AI provides technically correct renderings of vocabulary and grammar, it lacks what we might call cultural intuition—the human understanding of when linguistic precision should yield to emotional impact. Human translators demonstrate the ability to recognize which aspects of the original must be preserved and which transformed to connect with readers in a different context, sometimes departing from literal meaning to achieve a deeper fidelity to the poem’s vision. The contrast between AI’s semantic accuracy and human translators’ cultural intuition suggests that effective poetry translation requires not just linguistic knowledge but artistic sensitivity as well. This distinction points toward new pedagogical approaches that teach translation as a form of cultural mediation rather than a purely linguistic conversion. The question of how far translators should go in adapting works to target audiences remains a complex and context-dependent issue. However, our research suggests that emotional authenticity, rather than literal accuracy, might be the more meaningful boundary. Successful translations maintain the essence of the original while recon-

figuring its expression to resonate within the target culture. This goal requires informed judgments about which elements require transformation and which can be preserved to create bridges between worlds.

As translation of creative work, and particularly, of poetry, evolves with new technologies, it should maintain its dual focus on linguistic equivalence and meaningful dialogue across cultures. Technology assists with semantic accuracy, yet the negotiations that characterize poetry translation require human intuition and artistic sensitivity. In the tension between preservation and transformation, between fidelity to the letter and fidelity to the spirit, translators create connections that allow poems to speak across linguistic, cultural, and historical boundaries with authentic power. The art of bringing poems to life in new contexts remains the enduring value of human translation in an increasingly technological world.

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