



THE LOSS OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS AND METAPHORS IN AI TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the difficulties AI faces in translating idiomatic expressions and metaphors. While Neural Machine Translation tools such as Google Translate, DeepSeek, and ChatGPT provide accurate literal translations, they often misinterpret figurative language due to the lack of cultural and contextual understanding. As a result, semantic meaning and stylistic nuance are frequently lost. The article analyzes typical AI translation errors and discusses their impact on intercultural communication. It also suggests improvements such as hybrid human–AI translation models and culturally enriched corpora. Ultimately, the study concludes that human involvement remains essential in translating figurative language effectively..

Introduction. In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the translation industry, particularly through advanced Neural Machine Translation (NMT) tools such as Google Translate, DeepSeek, and ChatGPT. These technologies have indeed improved accuracy in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Nevertheless, when dealing with idiomatic expressions and metaphors, AI still faces critical limitations. This is mainly because figurative language requires cultural awareness, contextual reasoning, and cognitive interpretation, which current AI models only partially possess [5]. Consequently, such expressions are often translated literally, resulting in the loss of cultural nuance and communicative intention. Therefore, the problem of translating figurative language remains highly relevant and deserves deeper investigation.

Idioms and metaphors are not merely linguistic units; rather, they embody cultural beliefs, collective memory, and shared experiences of a community. For example, the English phrase “*spill the beans*” is frequently translated by AI as “*fasolyani to’kib yuborish*”, instead of the correct meaning “*to reveal a secret*”. Similarly, “*once in a blue moon*” should be interpreted as “*very rarely*”, yet AI may render it as “*ko’k oyning ostida bir marta*”, which is contextually meaningless.

Thus, AI often fails to capture figurative meaning when expressions:

- have no direct equivalent in the target language;
- include historical or cultural references;
- require emotional or pragmatic interpretation.

In other words, AI focuses on surface-level lexical meaning, whereas idioms demand deep semantic processing, which includes human-like cognition.

There are several interrelated reasons why AI struggles with idiomatic and metaphorical language: Firstly, AI lacks genuine cultural competence because it operates on data patterns rather than experiential knowledge. Secondly, it often prioritizes literal translation, as it is the statistically safest option. Thirdly, figurative expressions are frequently absent from multilingual training corpora. Moreover, idioms are context-dependent and may have multiple interpretations. Finally, AI systems lack pragmatic reasoning — they understand words, but not intention.

As a consequence, figurative language often gets “flattened” into simple literal forms, thereby losing its stylistic value and emotional impact [2].

The loss of idiomatic meaning can have serious implications. For instance, in literary translation, the aesthetic quality of the text may suffer significantly. Similarly, in diplomacy or international communication, a mistranslated idiom can cause misunderstanding or even offense. Furthermore, marketing slogans often rely on metaphors to persuade consumers; therefore, incorrect translation may weaken the entire campaign.

Consequently, AI-based translation should not be considered fully reliable in creative, political, or culturally sensitive contexts. Instead, human post-editing is frequently required to correct semantic distortions and ensure cultural appropriateness.

Examples of Frequent AI Errors

Original Idiom	AI Literal Translation	Correct Meaning
Break the ice	Muzni sindirish	Start a conversation
Hit the sack	Qopni urmoq	Go to sleep
Under the weather	Ob-havo ostida	Feeling unwell
Piece of cake	Kekning bo'lagi	Very easy
Run out of steam	Bug' tugadi	Lose energy

As the table clearly shows, literal translation leads to misinterpretation. Therefore, AI must be supplemented by human linguistic judgment, especially in figurative contexts.

To overcome these challenges, researchers and developers have proposed several potential solutions. Firstly, AI should be trained on culturally rich corpora that include idioms, slang, and metaphors. Secondly, hybrid translation models (AI + human editor) can significantly improve quality. Thirdly, semantic tagging and pragmatic annotation could guide AI toward correct meanings. Moreover, incorporating cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis into AI training may allow better interpretation of figurative language.

Ultimately, these strategies suggest that AI must evolve from lexical translation toward cognitive, pragmatic, and culturally aware translation processes.

Conclusion. To conclude, although AI translation has developed rapidly and shows impressive accuracy in literal language processing, it still struggles to interpret idiomatic expressions and metaphors. Therefore, human translators remain essential for preserving cultural meaning and emotional tone. In the future, AI must integrate cultural intelligence, pragmatic awareness, and contextual reasoning to achieve reliable translation of figurative language. Until then, the most effective approach is a hybrid system, where AI provides an

initial draft and human experts refine the figurative meaning to ensure clarity, accuracy, and cultural relevance.

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