

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND LITERARY TRANSLATION: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF HUMAN AND AI-GENERATED ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF
KAFKA'S THE METAMORPHOSIS

Karomatullayeva Shahinabonu Utkir qizi

Master's student of Webster University in Tashkent.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21908874>

Abstract. This study compares a human translation and an AI-generated translation of 40 passages from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* across meaning preservation, stylistic fidelity, and simplification. Both convey core meaning effectively, but the human translation consistently preserves ambiguity and stylistic nuance better than AI, which tends to render ambiguous expressions explicit. Results suggest AI is useful for drafting, but human revision remains essential when literary style and interpretive openness are prioritized.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, literary translation, Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, translation quality.

Introduction

AI has advanced rapidly in translation, yet literary translation remains challenging due to metaphor, ambiguity, and stylistic nuance that resist algorithmic capture (Baker, 2000; Yao et al., 2025). Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* exemplifies these challenges: its deliberate ambiguity and psychological tension create interpretive gaps that require careful translator judgment (Kafka, 1915). With generative AI now capable of full-text translation, questions arise about its ability to preserve literary qualities (Chen et al., 2026). This study compares a human and AI translation of selected passages to identify systematic differences in handling literary features.

Research questions:

1. How effectively does AI preserve literal meaning?
2. How successfully does AI maintain style and ambiguity?
3. What are the main differences between human and AI approaches?

Methods

Material

The source was Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (1915). We compared Ian Johnston's published English translation with an AI-generated version. Forty passages were purposively selected across the novella, each containing at least one literary feature (metaphor, ambiguity, emotional description, unusual vocabulary, dialogue, or narrative shift).

AI Protocol

All AI translations used the same prompt: "Translate the following literary passage into English. Preserve its meaning, literary style, ambiguity, emotional tone, and narrative perspective. Do not explain, simplify, or interpret the text."

Analytical Criteria

Translations were evaluated on:

- **Meaning preservation** – retention of denotative content.

- **Style preservation** – handling of vocabulary, syntax, imagery, register, and viewpoint.
 - **Simplification** – instances where ambiguous expressions became explicit.
- Analysis was qualitative with frequency counts.

Results

Both translations showed strengths and clear differences (Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of Translation Features (N = 40)

Feature	Human	AI
Meaning preserved	36	37
Style preserved	32	26
Ambiguity preserved	27	19
Simplified/explicit	8	16

Both conveyed basic meaning effectively, with AI slightly ahead (37 vs. 36). However, human translation preserved style more often (32 vs. 26). The largest gap involved ambiguity: human retained it in 27 passages, AI in only 19. In 16 AI passages, indirect expressions became explicit—a tendency seen in just 8 human passages.

Qualitatively, AI simplifications often involved emotional states (e.g., vague unease → explicit anxiety) or descriptive details (e.g., indeterminate creature → specific description). The human translator preserved the source's reticence more consistently.

Discussion

AI's strong meaning transfer confirms LLMs reliably handle informational content.

Differences emerged with ambiguity: Kafka's style thrives on what is unsaid, yet AI repeatedly resolved vagueness, narrowing interpretive possibilities—a pattern consistent with Yao et al. (2025). Similarly, AI externalized emotions, producing more readable but less evocative text.

These findings reveal an *interpretive orientation*: AI favors clarity and explicitness, valuable in most contexts but potentially at odds with literary aesthetics. This supports a collaborative model: AI drafts efficiently while humans refine metaphor, ambiguity, and voice (Chen et al., 2026).

Limitations include a modest corpus (40 passages), a single AI system, one human translation, and one author. Future research should expand to multiple models, translators, and genres.

Conclusion

Both translations convey core meanings, but human translation consistently outperforms AI in preserving ambiguity and stylistic nuance. AI more frequently simplifies indirect expressions into explicit statements, reducing interpretive openness.

AI holds potential as a drafting tool, but human revision remains essential when preserving literary style and interpretive depth is paramount.

References

1. Baker, M. (2000). Towards a methodology for investigating the style of a literary translator. *Target*, 12(2), 241–266.
2. Chen, L., Varga, L., & Mehdizadkhani, M. (2026). Taming AI for *The Little Prince*: A comparative analysis of NMTs and LLMs in Hungarian translation. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 13, 46.
3. Kafka, F. (1915). *Die Verwandlung*. Kurt Wolff Verlag.
4. Johnston, I. (Trans.). (n.d.). *The Metamorphosis*. Vancouver Island University. (Original work published 1915)
5. Yao, X., Kang, Y.-B., & McCosker, A. (2025). Missing the human touch? A computational stylometric analysis of GPT-4 translations of online Chinese literature. *Translation Spaces*, 14(2), 303–330.