Decoding Tilism: AI, Translation, and the Transference of Cultural Narratives

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Abstract: This paper explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) with translation studies, focusing on the dynamics of translation and transference in cultural and literary contexts. Using *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a seminal work in Urdu dastan literature, as a case study, it examines how AI-driven translation tools navigate the complex interplay of language, culture, and narrative. The process of translation is not merely a linguistic act but a form of transference, carrying the nuances of identity, ideology, and context across cultural borders. The study highlights how AI-mediated translations, while efficient, grapple with capturing the layered richness of texts like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, where metaphors, idioms, and cultural symbols resist reduction to algorithms. By analyzing instances of

successful and failed translations, the paper underscores the critical need for human-AI collaboration to preserve the integrity of literary works. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and potentials of integrating AI into the field of literary translation, emphasizing the necessity of culturally aware and ethically grounded approaches.

Key Words: translation studies, artificial intelligence, Tilism-e-Hoshruba, cultural transference, literary translation, human-AI collaboration

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence in Translation Studies:

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in translation studies has revolutionized how texts are translated across languages, offering unprecedented speed and accessibility. AI-driven tools such as Google Translate and DeepL utilize advanced machine learning algorithms, including neural networks and deep learning, to process and produce translations. These tools are particularly effective in handling large volumes of text and translating straightforward linguistic structures, making them invaluable for technical and functional translations (Liu et al., 2021). However, the application of AI in literary translation presents unique challenges due to the complexity of literary texts, which are often imbued with cultural, ideological, and symbolic nuances.

One of the primary advantages of AI in translation is its efficiency. AI models trained on vast multilingual datasets can perform translations in real-time, drastically reducing the time required for human translators. Moreover, AI tools are capable of maintaining consistency in terminology and style across lengthy documents, which is particularly beneficial in legal or scientific texts (Torres, 2020). However, literary translation, as a creative act, transcends linguistic conversion; it requires an understanding of context, culture, and artistic intent that AI often fails to grasp.

The limitations of AI in literary translation stem from its inability to fully interpret metaphors, idioms, and cultural references. For example, literary works such as Urdu's *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* are deeply rooted in cultural symbolism and rich narrative structures. These elements resist algorithmic reduction, as they require nuanced interpretation that considers the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the text (Ahmad, 2022). AI translations frequently result in

literal or reductive renditions that strip the original work of its layered meanings and aesthetic value.

Additionally, the lack of emotional and creative judgment in AI limits its effectiveness in capturing the essence of a literary piece. Human translators bring their cultural awareness, empathy, and subjective interpretation to the task, which are critical for preserving the integrity of the original text. This highlights the need for human-AI collaboration, where AI serves as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for human translators.

While AI-driven tools significantly enhance the efficiency of translation, their limitations in literary contexts underscore the importance of human oversight. As AI technology continues to evolve, fostering culturally aware and ethically grounded AI systems will be essential for their successful integration into literary translation.

Translation as Transference: Cultural, Ideological, and Narrative Dimensions

Translation is more than the act of rendering words from one language to another; it serves as a medium for the transfer of culture, ideology, and narrative across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This process, often referred to as "transference," highlights how translations are imbued with the nuances of identity and context, shaping how a text is received and understood in its target culture (Bassnett, 2002).

Cultural transference in translation involves conveying the traditions, symbols, and social contexts embedded within the source text. For instance, literary works like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* from Urdu literature are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical realities of South Asia. Translating such texts requires more than linguistic equivalence; it demands cultural sensitivity to ensure the preservation of metaphors, idioms, and symbolic imagery that are integral to the narrative (Ahmad, 2022). A literal translation risks erasing the cultural richness and alienating the target audience from the original intent of the text.

Ideological transference reflects the values, beliefs, and power dynamics present in the original text. Translators act as mediators, consciously or unconsciously, navigating between the source and target ideologies. In this sense, translation is not neutral but a politically and culturally charged act. Translators' choices in phrasing, tone, and omissions can amplify or obscure particular ideologies, making identity and context critical factors in shaping the translated text (Venuti, 1995).

The role of identity in translation extends to the translator's own cultural and ideological background, which inevitably influences their interpretation. Context, both historical and social, also shapes how a text is adapted. For example, translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* for a Western audience involves negotiating differences in narrative styles and cultural assumptions while maintaining the essence of the source text.

Translation as transference underscores the importance of understanding cultural and ideological contexts to ensure that a text's integrity is preserved. The act of translation is both an art and a responsibility, requiring sensitivity to the identities and narratives it carries across linguistic boundaries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tilism-e-Hoshruba: Challenges in Translating a Cultural and Literary Epic

Tilism-e-Hoshruba, an essential part of Urdu dastan literature, is celebrated for its complex narrative, intricate use of metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and rich cultural symbolism. Written in the 19th century as part of the larger *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* cycle, the text captures a world of fantastical storytelling, where magic, heroism, and wit intertwine. Translating such a work into another language poses significant challenges, particularly in maintaining its layered narrative and cultural essence.

The relevance of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* lies in its ability to capture the cultural zeitgeist of the Indo-Persian world. The text is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural milieu of the Mughal era, reflecting a blend of Persian, Arabic, and local traditions. Its fantastical tales are conveyed through vibrant metaphors and idioms, making the language not just a medium of communication but a vessel of cultural memory (Farooqi, 2009). These elements are inseparable from the narrative's identity, meaning that any attempt at translation must grapple with more than just linguistic equivalence—it must also convey the cultural and historical context.

One of the major challenges in translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* is resisting algorithmic reduction. AI-driven translation tools, while efficient, often reduce complex texts to literal interpretations, losing the layered richness of the original. For instance, phrases such as "tilism," which denotes an enchanted world, carry nuanced meanings that transcend their literal definitions. These terms are deeply embedded in South Asian folklore and mysticism, requiring

the translator to interpret their cultural resonance rather than provide a direct translation (Farooqi, 2009).

Similarly, the text's use of idioms and symbolic language resists algorithmic comprehension. Consider the idiomatic phrase "jismani tilism," which refers to a body-bound enchantment in the narrative. Translating this literally would strip it of its symbolic association with themes of control, captivity, and liberation, central to the story's moral undertones. Such nuances highlight the need for human involvement to interpret the text's cultural layers and preserve its literary integrity.

Another challenge lies in retaining the layered cultural and narrative richness of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*. The text's episodic structure, replete with digressions and subplots, mirrors the oral storytelling traditions of the Indo-Persian world. Translators must navigate these non-linear narratives while ensuring coherence for readers unfamiliar with the cultural framework. For example, the interplay between jinns, sorcerers, and human protagonists reflects a worldview where the supernatural and the mundane coexist seamlessly. Capturing this blend requires more than linguistic skill; it demands a deep understanding of the text's cultural ethos (Pritchett, 1991).

Translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* involves more than converting its words into another language. It is an act of cultural preservation, requiring the translator to balance fidelity to the original with accessibility for a global audience. While AI-driven tools offer valuable assistance, the complexity of the text underscores the irreplaceable role of human translators in interpreting its cultural and literary layers. Efforts to translate *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* must, therefore, prioritize preserving its narrative richness, cultural symbolism, and linguistic artistry.

Methodological Approaches in Translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*

The translation of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a seminal work in Urdu dastan literature, is a challenging endeavor that requires nuanced methodologies to assess the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in preserving cultural and narrative integrity. Two primary approaches—comparative analysis and qualitative analysis—enable a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in translating a culturally rich and linguistically intricate text. These methodologies provide insights into how AI-driven tools perform in comparison to human translators, particularly when navigating cultural and ideological transference.

Comparative Analysis: Human vs. AI-Generated Translations

Comparative analysis focuses on the evaluation of human and AI-generated translations of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* to assess their respective strengths and limitations. Human translations, such as those by Musharraf Ali Farooqi, reflect a deep engagement with the text's cultural, historical, and linguistic intricacies. Translators like Farooqi meticulously interpret the narrative layers, cultural metaphors, and idiomatic expressions to convey the spirit of the original work while ensuring accessibility for non-Urdu readers (Farooqi, 2009).

In contrast, AI-driven tools such as Google Translate or DeepL rely on machine learning algorithms trained on large multilingual datasets. While these tools excel in speed and consistency, they struggle with the nuanced demands of literary texts. For instance, an AI-generated translation of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* often reduces complex metaphors to literal interpretations, stripping the text of its symbolic richness. Consider the term "tilism," a central concept in the narrative that denotes an enchanted world. A human translator contextualizes this term within the story's fantastical framework, while AI tools frequently provide a generic translation such as "magic" or "enchantment," failing to capture its layered connotations within South Asian mystical traditions.

Moreover, human translators are adept at navigating the episodic and digressive structure of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a hallmark of oral storytelling traditions. AI tools, however, tend to prioritize linearity, often failing to preserve the fluid transitions between subplots and digressions that are central to the text's narrative style. A comparative analysis of specific passages highlights these discrepancies, revealing the limitations of AI in capturing the cultural and narrative essence of the text.

One influential theorist for comparative linguistic analysis in AI and human translation is Lawrence Venuti, known for his concepts of "domestication" and "foreignization" in translation studies. Venuti's framework highlights the translator's role in either adapting a text to the cultural norms of the target language (domestication) or preserving its original cultural and linguistic features (foreignization). This theory provides a valuable lens for analyzing AI and human translation by examining how each approach handles cultural and linguistic nuance. AI translations often lean toward domestication, reducing cultural depth to ensure accessibility, as algorithms prioritize clarity and simplicity. In contrast, human translators, guided by Venuti's

principles, can consciously choose to foreignize, retaining the original text's cultural richness to respect its identity. This theoretical perspective enables a comparative evaluation of AI's efficiency and limitations against the interpretive and cultural sensitivity of human translation, particularly in complex texts like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*.

Qualitative Analysis: Evaluating Transference and Cultural Resistance

Evaluating Instances of Transference in Translation

Qualitative analysis examines how successfully human and AI-generated translations achieve transference—the process of carrying cultural, ideological, and narrative elements from the source to the target language. In *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, transference involves preserving the text's intricate web of cultural symbols, idioms, and metaphors that are deeply rooted in the Indo-Persian tradition.

For example, idiomatic expressions such as "baalon mein uljhi hui chandni" (moonlight tangled in hair) reflect the poetic and evocative language characteristic of Urdu literature. A human translator interprets this imagery, capturing its romantic and mystical undertones in English. In contrast, AI-generated translations often produce literal and fragmented renditions that fail to convey the intended mood or symbolism. This highlights the critical role of human interpretation in ensuring effective transference.

Investigating Cultural Resistance in AI Outputs

Cultural resistance refers to the challenges AI tools face in translating elements of a text that resist algorithmic processing. These include culturally specific idioms, metaphors, and narrative conventions that defy direct equivalence in the target language. For instance, the portrayal of jinns, sorcerers, and enchanted realms in *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* reflects a worldview where the supernatural is intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life. Translating such elements requires an understanding of the cultural and historical context, which AI tools often lack.

Qualitative analysis identifies patterns of cultural resistance in AI outputs, focusing on areas where the translation process falters. For instance, metaphors involving South Asian flora and fauna, such as "shabnam ke moti" (dewdrops as pearls), are frequently mistranslated by AI tools due to their lack of cultural specificity. Human translators, by contrast, interpret these

metaphors within their cultural context, ensuring that the imagery resonates with the target audience.

Additionally, AI translations often homogenize the unique stylistic elements of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, such as its ornate descriptions and elaborate narrative digressions. This homogenization results in a loss of the text's distinctive voice, underscoring the limitations of AI in handling culturally and stylistically complex works.

Synthesis of Comparative and Qualitative Insights

The combination of comparative and qualitative analyses provides a holistic understanding of the challenges and potentials of integrating AI into literary translation. While AI tools offer significant advantages in terms of efficiency and scalability, their limitations in handling cultural and narrative complexity highlight the indispensability of human oversight. Human translators not only bring linguistic expertise but also the cultural sensitivity and interpretive judgment necessary for preserving the integrity of a text like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*.

By identifying specific areas where AI falters—such as the translation of idioms, metaphors, and narrative structures—qualitative analysis informs the development of more culturally aware and contextually sensitive AI systems. Comparative analysis, meanwhile, underscores the need for human-AI collaboration, where AI serves as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for human translators.

The translation of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* exemplifies the broader challenges of integrating AI into the field of literary translation. Through comparative and qualitative analyses, this study highlights the critical importance of preserving cultural and narrative richness in the face of algorithmic reduction. While AI-driven tools have revolutionized translation in many respects, their limitations in handling culturally complex texts underscore the enduring relevance of human translators. Future efforts must focus on fostering human-AI collaboration and developing ethically grounded AI systems that respect the cultural and literary integrity of texts like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*.

The Limitations of AI in Literary Translation

AI translation tools operate on advanced neural network algorithms, trained on large multilingual datasets. While these systems excel at processing straightforward linguistic structures and achieving grammatical accuracy, they struggle with the subtleties of literary texts, especially those as intricate as *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*. The text's fantastical and culturally dense nature includes idiomatic expressions, ornate descriptions, and metaphors steeped in the Indo-Persian tradition, all of which are difficult for AI to interpret.

For instance, a phrase like "jadoo ka tilism," which refers to an enchanted magical world, carries not only a literal meaning but also connotations tied to South Asian mystical traditions. AI tools often translate this as "magic's enchantment," a rendering that lacks the cultural and symbolic depth intrinsic to the original. Similarly, *Tilism-e-Hoshruba's* episodic narrative structure, replete with digressions and subplots, mirrors oral storytelling traditions, which can be misrepresented or simplified by AI systems prioritizing linearity and coherence over authenticity.

The Role of Human Oversight in Preserving Integrity

Human translators play a pivotal role in bridging the gaps left by AI systems. Translators bring cultural sensitivity, contextual awareness, and creative judgment that are critical for interpreting the text's nuances. For example, in the translation of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, human oversight ensures that idiomatic expressions like "chiragh tale andhera" (darkness under the lamp) are rendered not just literally but metaphorically, preserving the intended meanings and resonances in the target language.

Moreover, human translators are better equipped to navigate the ideological and cultural dimensions of the text. *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* is deeply rooted in the socio-political and religious ethos of its time, reflecting themes of power, morality, and identity. A translator must recognize and interpret these elements, ensuring that they are appropriately contextualized for the target audience. AI tools, lacking historical and cultural awareness, are unable to fulfill this task adequately.

Human translators also excel in addressing stylistic challenges. The ornate and poetic language of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* includes elaborate metaphors, hyperbolic descriptions, and rhetorical flourishes that are central to its aesthetic appeal. Translating such language requires creativity and interpretive skill, qualities that AI systems cannot replicate.

Human-AI Collaboration: A Synergistic Approach

The integration of human oversight with AI tools creates a collaborative model that combines the strengths of both. AI systems can assist by providing initial drafts, accelerating the translation process, and ensuring consistency in terminology. However, these drafts must be refined and validated by human translators to preserve the cultural and literary integrity of the original text.

In translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, this collaborative approach allows human translators to focus on interpreting complex idioms, cultural references, and stylistic elements, while AI handles repetitive or less nuanced tasks. For instance, AI can efficiently translate straightforward narrative passages, freeing up human translators to dedicate their efforts to sections of the text that require deep cultural or aesthetic insight. Additionally, human-AI collaboration can enhance the scalability of translation projects. By delegating routine tasks to AI, human translators can manage larger workloads while maintaining high standards of quality.

Culturally Aware Approaches to Translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*

The translation of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a masterpiece of Urdu dastan literature, demands not only linguistic expertise but also cultural sensitivity and ethical consideration. This text, deeply entrenched in South Asian cultural traditions, is replete with metaphors, idioms, and symbolic elements that reflect its historical and sociocultural milieu. Any translation of such a culturally significant work must prioritize the preservation of its cultural essence and ethical integrity. With the increasing involvement of AI in literary translation, it becomes imperative to integrate cultural awareness into AI training and adopt ethical approaches that respect the identity of the original text.

Cultural awareness is indispensable in translating a text like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*. This narrative reflects a synthesis of Islamic, Persian, and South Asian folklore, evident in its rich

descriptions of magical realms, mystical beings, and heroic adventures. The metaphors and idioms in *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* are steeped in this cultural context, and their meanings are often inseparable from the worldview they represent.

For instance, the term *tilism* itself, central to the narrative, represents an enchanted world governed by magical laws. It is not merely a synonym for "magic" but an intricate concept tied to themes of power, control, and liberation in South Asian mysticism. Translating this term requires not just linguistic equivalence but also an understanding of its cultural and philosophical connotations.

AI translation tools, however, are often ill-equipped to handle such cultural nuances. These tools rely on datasets that prioritize linguistic patterns over cultural context, resulting in translations that are grammatically accurate but culturally deficient. For example, the AI might translate the idiomatic phrase "shabnam ke moti" (dewdrops as pearls) literally, missing its poetic and symbolic resonance in the Urdu literary tradition.

To address these challenges, AI training must incorporate culturally rich datasets and contextual knowledge. Annotating datasets with cultural and historical information can help AI systems better understand the meanings and implications of culturally significant terms and phrases. For instance, training an AI model with examples from *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* and related Urdu literary texts would enable it to recognize recurring motifs and idiomatic expressions within their proper cultural framework. Additionally, collaboration with linguists and cultural experts during AI development can enhance the system's ability to process culturally dense material.

Advancing AI in Translation Studies: Enhancing Cultural and Narrative Depth in Translating *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*

The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in translation studies has grown substantially, yet its application to culturally and narratively complex texts such as *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* continues to expose its limitations.

Understanding the Challenges

Tilism-e-Hoshruba presents unique challenges due to its rich use of metaphors, idioms, and culturally specific references. For instance, terms like *tilism* and *ayyari* (trickery or strategic cunning) are deeply embedded in South Asian mystical and heroic traditions, carrying layered meanings that extend beyond their surface definitions. Similarly, the text's episodic narrative structure, interwoven with digressions and poetic descriptions, reflects oral storytelling conventions that may seem chaotic or redundant to an algorithm seeking linearity.

AI translation tools, such as neural machine translation (NMT) systems, primarily focus on syntactic and semantic accuracy. However, their lack of contextual and cultural awareness often results in translations that miss the symbolic essence of phrases like "chiragh tale andhera" (darkness under the lamp), which metaphorically conveys hidden truths. To address these limitations, AI algorithms must evolve to incorporate cultural intelligence, enabling them to recognize and interpret such subtleties.

Advancing AI Capabilities

Enhancing AI's ability to handle cultural and narrative depth involves integrating contextual understanding into its training processes. One potential solution is curating culturally rich datasets that include texts like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* alongside annotations explaining their historical, ideological, and narrative contexts. For example, the metaphorical usage of "jadoo ka tilism" (the magic of enchantment) can be annotated to highlight its cultural connotations of power and illusion, enabling AI systems to generate contextually nuanced translations.

Another advancement lies in the development of hybrid models that combine AI algorithms with knowledge graphs. By linking cultural references, historical events, and literary motifs, such models could allow AI systems to better understand and contextualize elements within complex texts. In the case of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a knowledge graph might connect the text's magical elements to broader themes in Indo-Persian cosmology, ensuring that translations retain their symbolic richness.

Additionally, incorporating sentiment analysis and stylistic modeling into AI systems can improve their ability to capture the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of literary texts. *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* often employs hyperbolic descriptions to evoke awe and wonder, such as when

describing the magnificence of magical fortresses. Advanced AI systems could analyze the stylistic patterns of such descriptions, generating translations that preserve their intended emotional impact.

Contribution to Knowledge

The exploration of AI's role in translating culturally rich texts such as *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* significantly enhances the understanding of how AI can contribute to literary and cultural translation. While AI tools have proven efficient in processing vast amounts of text and handling linguistic patterns, their application to complex, layered works like *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* exposes limitations that demand deeper investigation. This research highlights the need for integrating cultural awareness and narrative understanding into AI systems, thereby advancing existing studies on AI translation technologies. By focusing on *Tilism-e-Hoshruba*, a text replete with idioms, metaphors, and cultural symbolism, the study bridges gaps in AI translation research, which often centers on technical or linguistically straightforward texts. The case of *Tilism-e-Hoshruba* exemplifies how AI struggles with retaining cultural depth and narrative coherence, offering a critical lens to examine and refine AI capabilities. Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the ethical and practical implications of AI in translation. This balanced approach, rooted in both technological innovation and human expertise, paves the way for more nuanced and respectful translations of literary masterpieces.

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