
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Human and AI Translation of Metaphor and Idioms in Postcolonial Arabic Literature: A Comparative Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the translation of metaphor and idiomatic expression in postcolonial Arabic literature through a comparative evaluation of human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash. Focusing on selected examples from Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses*, the study investigates how figurative language encoded in cultural, social, and political experience is rendered in English, and how far the human translator and the AI system succeed in preserving meaning, imagery, tone, and narrative force. The analysis is guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining equivalence theory, domestication and foreignization, and narrative theory, allowing the study to assess translation at the lexical, cultural, and ideological levels. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical comparative method, the paper studies a set of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions representing honor, kinship, land, resistance, religion, and colloquial speech. The findings show that the human translator generally preserves figurative force through context-sensitive paraphrase, image retention, or culturally informed reformulation, while Gemini 3.6 Flash often moves toward literal rendering, semantic narrowing, or partial domestication that reduces the richness of the original expression. In some cases, the AI output remains intelligible but loses the emotional and cultural density that gives the source text its literary power. The study concludes that, in postcolonial Arabic literary translation, human mediation remains essential for preserving figurative meaning and narrative positioning, while AI tools may serve only as preliminary support rather than as a replacement for human judgment.

KEYWORDS

Postcolonial Arabic literature, machine translation, metaphor, idiom, equivalence, domestication and foreignization, narrative theory

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1. Introduction

Postcolonial Arabic literature is marked by an especially dense relationship between language, history, and identity, a relationship that has long been emphasized in postcolonial approaches to modern Arabic writing. Hassan (2002) argues that modern Arabic literature is deeply shaped by colonial encounters and its afterlives, so that literary language cannot be separated from the historical experience it records and resists. In such writing, metaphor and idiom are not ornamental additions or stylistic flourishes; they are often the main vehicles through which collective memory, social hierarchy, resistance, honor, loss, and belonging are expressed. Figurative language in this literary tradition frequently carries meanings that extend far beyond the literal level, because it is shaped by oral culture, religious discourse, tribal ethics, historical trauma, and the political realities of colonization and displacement. Aldelaa (2022) likewise shows that Arabic fixed expressions are highly dependent on cultural and syntactic specificity, which makes them resistant to simple one-to-one transfer into English. For this reason, translating postcolonial Arabic literature into English is never a purely technical task. It is an act of interpretation in which the translator must decide whether to preserve the original image, explain it, replace it, or adapt it for the expectations of the target reader. That decision is

also ideological, because translation inevitably mediates between the foreignness of the source text and the norms of the target culture, a point Venuti (1995) makes central to translation theory through his distinction between domestication and foreignization.

This challenge becomes especially visible in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses*, a novel deeply rooted in Palestinian experience and historical consciousness. As a work of postcolonial Arabic fiction, the novel draws heavily on figurative expressions connected to Bedouin life, kinship relations, honor codes, agricultural imagery, religious symbolism, and national memory. Its language does not simply describe events; it builds a cultural world in which horses, land, women, blood, protection, olive trees, and ancestral inheritance all function as symbols of identity and continuity. Such imagery is characteristic of Arabic literary texts that emerge from histories of dispossession and resistance, where language often becomes a site of cultural self-assertion rather than neutral description (Hassan, 2002). Many of these expressions resist direct transfer into English because they depend on associations that are deeply embedded in Arab and Palestinian cultural knowledge. A literal rendering may preserve the surface meaning of the words while losing the emotional force, ideological weight, or narrative resonance of the original expression. In such cases, equivalence is not simply a matter of matching words; it becomes a question of whether the translation preserves the pragmatic and cultural function of the expression in its original setting, a concern that aligns with Baker's account of translation as a process of re-narration and reframing rather than mechanical substitution (Baker, 2006).

This issue has become even more significant in the age of neural machine translation and large language models. Systems such as Gemini 3.6 Flash can produce fluent and grammatically acceptable English at remarkable speed, and this has encouraged broader interest in their use for literary and semi-literary texts. Yet fluency does not necessarily mean fidelity to figurative meaning. The empirical literature on Arabic machine translation repeatedly shows that idioms, metaphors, and other culturally embedded expressions remain some of the most difficult items for AI systems to handle reliably. Studies of Arabic literary metaphors and idioms show that machine translation often defaults to literal rendering, semantic narrowing, or replacement with a more familiar target-language expression, especially when the figurative source item does not have a strong equivalent in the training data (Mahdi, 2023; Beldjenna, 2025; Rahman & Ismail, 2025; Najsp, 2025). In other words, AI can often make the translation look smooth, but that smoothness may come at the cost of the very strangeness and density that make figurative language literary. This is precisely where translation becomes difficult to automate, because the problem is not only lexical but also cultural and narrative: the system must recognize when a phrase is idiomatic, infer its social function, and decide whether to keep its image, explain it, or replace it. Current AI systems can do this unevenly, but they do not yet do it with the consistency or interpretive awareness that human translators bring to literary texts.

This paper addresses that gap by asking how human translators and AI systems differ in their treatment of metaphor and idiom in postcolonial Arabic fiction, and what those differences reveal about the capacities and limitations of current AI translation technology when confronted with politically and culturally loaded literary language. The study is guided by four questions: what categories of metaphor and idiom recur in postcolonial Arabic narrative and what specific lexical challenges do they present; how do human translators and AI systems differ in the strategies they apply to these expressions; what is lost or gained, in equivalence and cultural terms, in AI-generated renderings compared with published human translations; and what are the broader implications of these differences for the narrative and ideological representation of postcolonial Arab experience to English-language readers. These questions matter because literary translation is not a neutral technical exercise; it is, as Baker (2006) argues, an act of narrative construction that shapes how target readers come to understand a source culture. In that sense, the translator is not merely transferring meaning but actively participating in the circulation, selection, and reshaping of narratives about identity and conflict.

Through a human-versus-AI comparison, this paper contributes to current debates about the role of machine translation in literary studies and translation practice. It offers a focused case study of how a contemporary AI model, Gemini 3.6 Flash, handles figurative language in a politically and culturally loaded Arabic novel. More broadly, it argues that the value of translation in postcolonial literature lies not only in semantic accuracy but also in the preservation of narrative voice, symbolic density, and cultural memory. Venuti's (1995) distinction between domestication and foreignization is especially useful here because AI systems, by design, often drift toward fluent and domesticated output, while human literary translators can deliberately preserve foreignness when it is essential to the text's meaning. Thus, the study addresses a practical question for translation today: whether AI can assist literary translation without displacing the human judgment that postcolonial texts still require. The answer depends not only on how well AI handles words, but on whether it can recognize the layered cultural and ideological work that metaphor and idiom perform in Arabic literature shaped by histories of colonization, resistance, and collective memory.

2. Literature Review

Arabic literary translation involves more than transferring propositional content between languages. Literary texts encode social values, historical experience, cultural assumptions, emotional intensities, and narrative perspectives through expressions

whose meanings cannot always be recovered from their individual lexical components. Metaphors may construct character identity, organize conceptual experience, and sustain imagery across a narrative, while idioms accumulate culturally specific meanings that are not reducible to literal denotation. Translation choices therefore influence not only semantic accuracy but also tone, characterization, cultural visibility, ideological positioning, and the reader's interpretation of the fictional world. This is especially true in postcolonial Arabic literature, where figurative language often carries the weight of memory, displacement, resistance, and collective identity. Recent work on contemporary Arabic dystopian fiction likewise shows how narrative form can diagnose authoritarian power and resistance, with Rabie's *Otared* analysed as staging "necropolitical temporality" through the manipulation of memory, agency, and futurity (Abedalqader, 2025). Recent work on Arab Spring diasporas similarly shows how war memoirs and testimonial narratives construct "new forms of diasporic identities and social mobilizations" among Syrians both outside and within their homeland, highlighting the deep entanglement between conflict, displacement, and narrative identity (Abedalqader et al., 2021).

The problem is particularly pronounced in Arabic literary writing because culturally embedded expressions frequently refer to religion, honor, kinship, gender, social reputation, poverty, hospitality, resistance, national identity, and everyday colloquial experience. A translation can communicate the general message while weakening the implicit or "emic" cultural meaning carried by figurative language (Al-Masri, 2009). Similarly, postcolonial fiction requires attention to ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings because the representation of identity, women, nationalism, anticolonialism, and Arab resistance may be altered even when surface content remains intelligible (Zainab, 2025). In other words, the translation of Arabic literary metaphor and idiom is not simply a lexical challenge; it is also a challenge of cultural transmission and narrative positioning.

Beyond literary figurative language, recent work also highlights the role of persuasion and rhetoric in intercultural academic discourse. ALYousef et al. (2025) show that Jordanian academic interactions rely on different configurations of ethos, logos, and pathos, and that language choice and translation between Arabic and English can itself function as a persuasive tool. Although their focus is on spoken academic discourse rather than fiction, their findings reinforce the idea that translation operates within intercultural dynamics where rhetorical strategies, identity, and language choice intersect, a context that is also relevant to postcolonial Arabic literary translation.

Translation studies have long treated the problem of equivalence as central to understanding how meaning moves between languages. Nida's distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence remains foundational because it captures a basic tension in translation: whether the translator should preserve the source form as closely as possible or prioritize the naturalness and effect of the target text on the reader (Nida, 1964). Baker extends this discussion by identifying the main levels at which non-equivalence can occur, including the word, collocation, grammar, text, and pragmatics, thereby offering a more detailed framework for explaining why a translated text may depart from its source even when it remains semantically intelligible (Baker, 2018). These ideas are especially relevant to Arabic-English translation because Arabic's root-and-pattern morphology, rich collocational structure, and layered semantic systems frequently produce the very kinds of translation difficulty that Baker describes (Ryding, 2005; Holes, 2004). In literary writing, this becomes even more complex, since meaning is not carried only by individual words but by image patterns, rhetorical framing, and culturally marked expressions that resist direct lexical transfer.

Within literary translation, Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization has provided one of the most influential ways of analyzing translation strategy. Domestication refers to the practice of adapting the source text to target-culture norms and thereby minimizing the visibility of the translator, whereas foreignization preserves signs of source-culture difference and makes the translated text feel less transparent but more culturally marked (Venuti, 1995). Venuti argues that the dominance of domestication in Anglo-American translation often erases the foreignness of the source text and, with it, its cultural specificity. This argument is especially important for postcolonial literature, where translation can either preserve or weaken the political and historical texture of the original work. Postcolonial translation theorists such as Spivak and Bhabha deepen this point by showing that translation is shaped by unequal power relations between cultures, languages, and readers; translation is therefore never a neutral transfer of content but an act positioned within systems of representation and asymmetry (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2000; Shamma, 2009). In postcolonial Arabic literature, this means that the choice between domesticating and foreignizing a figurative expression can carry ideological consequences well beyond stylistic preference.

Baker's narrative theory adds another important dimension by reframing translation as an act of re-narration. According to Baker (2006), translators do not merely reproduce statements; they reconstruct the narratives through which events, identities, and conflicts are understood in another language and culture. In this view, lexical choices are never innocent, because they help position the target reader within a particular interpretation of the source text's world. A translator's decision to preserve, replace, explain, or neutralize a term with political or cultural force can change how readers understand the identities and struggles represented in the text (Baker, 2006). This insight is especially relevant to Palestinian and other postcolonial Arabic narratives,

where politically charged vocabulary is central to the representation of resistance, displacement, and collective memory (Suleiman, 2013). Translation is therefore both linguistic and ideological: it shapes the visibility of conflict, belonging, and historical experience in the target culture.

Related work on bilingual interaction also highlights how Arabic and English are strategically alternated in real-life Jordanian contexts. ALYousef et al. (2025) show that Jordanian bilingual speakers use code-switching between Arabic (L1) and English (L2) for identity expression, self-confidence, and to compensate for lexical gaps, with intra-sentential switching being especially frequent. Although this study focuses on spoken interaction rather than literary translation, it reinforces the view that language choice and alternation between Arabic and English are functionally motivated, a point that underlines the intercultural dynamics at play in Arabic–English translation of postcolonial texts.

The linguistic structure of Arabic itself helps explain why metaphor and idiom are so resistant to direct transfer into English. Related work on bilingual interaction also highlights how Arabic and English are strategically alternated in real-life Jordanian contexts. ALYousef et al. (2025) show that Jordanian bilingual speakers use code-switching between Arabic (L1) and English (L2) for identity expression, self-confidence, and to compensate for lexical gaps, with intra-sentential switching being especially frequent. Although this study focuses on spoken interaction rather than literary translation, it reinforces the view that language choice and alternation between Arabic and English are functionally motivated, a point that underlines the intercultural dynamics at play in Arabic–English translation of postcolonial texts. Arabic's trilateral root system creates dense networks of related meanings, while diglossia produces a relationship between formal and colloquial registers that has no simple structural equivalent in English (Watson, 2002; Dickins et al., 2016). These features make figurative language particularly difficult to translate because meaning often depends on shared cultural knowledge, idiomatic usage, and interpretive inference rather than literal denotation alone. ALYousef and Mahadi (2019a, 2019b) further show that Arabic repetition and verbal emphasis are not merely ornamental but perform semantic, pragmatic, and persuasive functions that are often weakened when translated through omission, paraphrase, or overly literal rendering. Aldelaa (2022) shows that even within Arabic fixed expressions, translation outcomes vary depending on syntactic structure, with adjectival idioms tending to be easier for machine translation than proverbial expressions.

Building on this, ALYousef and Mahadi (2019a) show that Arabic verbal emphasis and emphatic repetition, as found in literary texts by Mahfouz and Kanafani, often create semantic and pragmatic effects that cannot be reproduced by simple lexical transfer, and that erroneous strategies such as omission or over-paraphrase frequently weaken the intended emphasis in English. This suggests that not all figurative language poses the same level of difficulty, but it also confirms that idiom translation is highly sensitive to form and context. Mahdi's study of metaphor in Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh* further demonstrates that metaphor translation requires careful strategy selection, since AI systems may reproduce source images in some cases but fail to handle more abstract or culturally embedded metaphorical structures with equal success (Mahdi, 2023).

A growing body of empirical research now compares human and AI translation of Arabic figurative language more directly. Mahdi (2023) found that ChatGPT-4.0 performed better than Google Translate in rendering Arabic metaphors into English, especially when the metaphor was concrete-to-abstract, but human translation still offered greater nuance and contextual appropriateness. Rahman and Ismail (2025) similarly found that AI and NMT systems could manage idioms with close target-language equivalents, but struggled when idioms were culturally distant and required deeper inference. A separate study of 145 Arabic idioms reported that Google Translate relied on literal translation in 74% of cases, while ChatGPT did so in 48%, and that only a small portion of translations achieved genuinely figurative equivalents (Najsp, 2025). These findings suggest that AI systems are often strongest when a clear lexical counterpart exists and weakest when translation demands interpretive reconstruction rather than substitution. Recent MT scholarship also emphasizes the shift from rule-based and statistical approaches to neural architectures and the importance of transparent evaluation in academic and applied translation contexts (AL-Yousef et al., 2025). In other words, literal accuracy and literary adequacy are not the same thing.

Other studies reinforce this conclusion from different angles. Beldjenna (2025) compared Google Translate, ChatGPT-4, and human translation using the Multidimensional Quality Metrics framework and found that human translation achieved the highest accuracy, fluency, and cultural depth, while ChatGPT-4, though more fluent than Google Translate, still tended to simplify or weaken metaphorical meaning. Studies of dialectal poetry translation show a similar pattern: AI systems may handle literal wording reasonably well, but they often struggle with poetic devices, symbolic metaphor, and culturally saturated idiom in Levantine and Egyptian verse (Advances in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, 2025). Broader LLM benchmarking studies also confirm that human professional translators are still preferred over top-performing models in literary translation tasks, even when the machine output appears fluent or semantically adequate at a surface level (Karpinska & Iyyer, 2024, as cited in related LLM literary-translation benchmarking studies). These results matter because they show that the central weakness of current AI

systems is not simple inaccuracy, but a persistent inability to preserve figurative intensity, emotional resonance, and culturally embedded literary effect.

The literature on cultural equivalence further clarifies the problem. Al-Masri (2009) argues that a translation may preserve the general message of a passage while still losing its implicit cultural meaning, especially when the expression carries social, emotional, or identity-based significance. Obeidat and Tengku Mahadi (2019) similarly show that religious and cultural collocations are often domesticated in translation, but that such domestication can reduce the text's cultural distinctiveness. Taai (2011) warns that domestication may become misleading when it makes a text appear accessible while quietly altering its meaning or ideological tone. In the specific case of political discourse, ALYousef and Mahadi (2019b) demonstrate that built-in linguistic repetition in Arabic speeches, such as those of Jamal Abdel Nasser, is more frequent and more structurally integrated than in English, and that translators who ignore or dilute this repetition risk losing significant persuasive and pragmatic functions in the target text.

Taken together, this literature establishes a clear pattern. Human translators generally outperform AI systems when figurative language requires interpretive judgment, contextual sensitivity, and cultural mediation. AI systems offer speed, fluency, and sometimes acceptable lexical rendering, but they often weaken or flatten metaphors and idioms when those expressions depend on culturally specific knowledge or narrative positioning. At the same time, the literature also shows that human translation is not flawless: human translators can domesticate too much, omit implicit meaning, or simplify culturally dense expressions for readability. This means that the issue is not whether humans are perfect and AI is flawed, but rather how each performs under different kinds of figurative and cultural pressure. The present study builds on this body of research by applying an integrated equivalence, domestication/foreignization, and narrative-theoretic framework to selected examples from *The Time of White Horses*, with the specific aim of examining how human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash handle metaphors and idioms in postcolonial Arabic fiction. Despite the growing body of research on Arabic figurative translation and machine translation performance, no study has yet provided a focused, text-based comparison between human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash in rendering metaphors and idioms in a postcolonial Arabic novel. Nor has any study examined such translation choices through the combined lenses of equivalence, domestication/foreignization, and narrative theory. To date, no study has systematically compared human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash in rendering metaphor and idiom in a postcolonial Arabic novel, nor examined such choices through an integrated equivalence, domestication/foreignization, and narrative-theoretic lens. This study contributes a text-based, theoretically grounded comparison of human and AI translation in a postcolonial Arabic novel, highlighting the limits of AI for figurative, culturally embedded literary language.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that brings together equivalence theory, domestication and foreignization, and narrative theory. These three approaches are used together because each explains a different level at which metaphor and idiom create difficulty in Arabic literary translation: equivalence clarifies the linguistic level of transfer, domestication/foreignization clarifies the cultural orientation of the translation, and narrative theory clarifies the ideological and interpretive consequences of translation choices. Together, they make it possible to evaluate not only whether a translation is understandable, but also whether it preserves the figurative, cultural, and narrative force of the source text.

Equivalence theory provides the most direct starting point for translation analysis because it addresses the central question of how a message can move from one language to another while retaining meaning. Nida's distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence remains foundational in this respect. Formal equivalence prioritizes fidelity to the source text's wording, structure, and surface organization, while dynamic equivalence prioritizes the effect of the text on the target reader and seeks the closest natural equivalent in the receiving language (Nida, 1964). In literary translation, this distinction is especially useful because metaphor and idiom often force a choice between preserving the original image and reproducing the original effect. A literal rendering may preserve lexical shape but fail to preserve meaning, while a freer rendering may preserve communicative force but alter the source image. This tension is particularly important in Arabic literary writing, where figurative language often depends on culturally specific associations rather than direct denotation.

Baker's contribution refines this issue by showing that equivalence is not a single decision but a set of decisions across multiple linguistic levels. Baker identifies equivalence at the word level, above the word level, grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence (Baker, 2018). This model is especially useful for Arabic-English translation because many problems in figurative language arise not only from the meaning of an individual word, but also from collocation, syntactic patterning, discourse flow, and contextual implication. A metaphor may be lexically accurate but collocationally awkward, or pragmatically correct but culturally flattened. Baker's framework therefore allows this study to assess translation outcomes more

precisely: a human or AI rendering can be evaluated for whether it preserves the source image at the word level, whether it produces natural collocations in English, whether it maintains grammatical coherence, whether it preserves the flow of the text, and whether it conveys the intended pragmatic effect. This layered model is especially valuable for analyzing postcolonial Arabic literature, where figurative language frequently carries social and historical meaning that extends beyond sentence-level semantics.

The second major framework is Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization. Venuti defines domestication as the strategy of adapting the source text to target-culture norms so that it reads fluently and transparently, while foreignization preserves the foreignness of the source text and allows the reader to encounter its cultural difference more directly (Venuti, 1995). In Venuti's view, domestication often renders the translator invisible and reduces the cultural alterity of the original text, whereas foreignization resists such reduction and makes the act of translation more visible. This distinction is essential for the present study because postcolonial Arabic fiction is not simply literature in another language; it is literature shaped by histories of colonization, resistance, identity, and cultural survival. In such a context, the decision to domesticate or foreignize is never merely stylistic. It may either preserve the culturally specific meaning of a metaphor or idiom, or it may make the text more accessible at the cost of historical and political depth.

Postcolonial translation theory strengthens this point by emphasizing that translation occurs within unequal relations of power. Spivak's "Politics of Translation" and Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and the third space both suggest that translation from formerly colonized cultures into English is shaped by asymmetries between source and target languages (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 2000). Shamma (2009) similarly argues that translation in postcolonial contexts is never neutral because it is tied to cultural representation and ideological mediation. In this study, domestication and foreignization are therefore treated as ethically significant orientations rather than binary labels. A domesticating choice may improve readability but weaken the political or symbolic weight of a phrase, while a foreignizing choice may preserve cultural specificity but require greater interpretive effort from the reader. This is particularly relevant to a text like *The Time of White Horses*, where images of horses, land, women, honor, and resistance are deeply embedded in Palestinian cultural memory.

The third component of the framework is Baker's narrative theory. Baker (2006) argues that translation is a form of re-narration: translators do not simply reproduce statements but reconstruct the narratives through which events, identities, and conflicts are understood. Translation choices can therefore reshape how readers perceive social groups, political struggles, and historical experience. This is especially relevant to postcolonial Arabic literature, where figurative language often contributes directly to the construction of collective identity and resistance. If a translator preserves a culturally marked metaphor, the target reader may encounter the source culture more vividly; if the metaphor is replaced with a generic English expression, the narrative may become less culturally specific and less politically resonant. Narrative theory is thus used in this study to interpret the broader ideological consequences of lexical choices, especially in expressions that evoke Palestinian identity, colonial conflict, kinship, and belonging (Suleiman, 2013).

These three frameworks complement one another. Equivalence theory explains what happens at the level of language and meaning transfer. Domestication and foreignization explain the translator's cultural orientation. Narrative theory explains how those choices affect the reader's understanding of the text's world. Taken together, they allow this paper to move from micro-level analysis of figurative expressions to macro-level interpretation of literary and ideological effects. This is particularly important in comparing human translation with Gemini 3.6 Flash, because an AI system may produce output that looks fluent, yet still fail to preserve the source text's figurative or narrative force. The framework therefore makes it possible to judge not only whether the translation is readable, but whether it remains faithful to the literary and cultural work performed by metaphor and idiom in the source text.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical comparative design. Such a design is appropriate because the research questions concern meaning, strategy, and cultural effect rather than numerical generalization. The aim is to examine how selected metaphors and idioms from *The Time of White Horses* are handled by human translation and by Gemini 3.6 Flash, and to interpret what those differences reveal about the translation of postcolonial Arabic literature into English. The study is therefore text-centered, interpretive, and comparative. This approach aligns with recent MT research stressing the value of empirical evaluation, domain sensitivity, and case-based analysis in assessing machine translation quality (AL-Yousef et al., 2025).

The primary data consist of selected excerpts from Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Time of White Horses* together with their human translations and Gemini 3.6 Flash renderings. The examples were chosen because they represent recurring figurative patterns in the novel, including idioms of honor, kinship, threat, protection, emotional intensity, social reputation, and culturally loaded metaphor. These excerpts were not selected randomly; they were selected purposively because they are particularly revealing of the translation challenges central to this study. Each example is treated as a small unit of analysis in which source text,

human translation, and AI translation can be compared directly. The comparison focuses on the structure of the figurative expression, the translation strategy used, the degree of equivalence achieved, and the cultural or narrative implications of the rendering.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, each example is identified and classified according to its figurative type, such as metaphor, idiom, proverb-like expression, or culturally bound expression. Second, the human translation and Gemini output are compared to the source text in terms of lexical choice, syntax, imagery, and communicative effect. Third, each translation is evaluated according to the theoretical framework: equivalence is assessed at the word, collocation, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels; the translation is classified as more domesticating or foreignizing; and the narrative impact of the translation choice is interpreted. Fourth, the findings are synthesized across the whole set of examples in order to identify broader patterns in human and AI performance. This structure makes it possible to move from detailed case analysis to a broader explanation of how figurative meaning is preserved, reduced, or transformed.

The analytical method remains qualitative throughout. This means that the study does not count occurrences in a statistical sense or attempt to produce a numerical ranking of human and AI performance. Instead, it evaluates how meaning is constructed and reconstructed in each case. The human translation is treated as a benchmark not because it is automatically perfect, but because it reflects conscious interpretive judgment, cultural awareness, and stylistic choice. Gemini 3.6 Flash is treated as a comparable translation agent whose performance can be examined for fluency, literalness, cultural sensitivity, and narrative preservation. The point of comparison is not to claim that all AI output is inferior or that all human translation is superior, but to show where each succeeds and where each loses something important.

Validity in this study is strengthened by the use of triangulated theoretical lens. Equivalence theory helps identify the linguistic level at which meaning is lost or preserved. Domestication and foreignization help interpret the cultural direction of each rendering. Narrative theory helps explain the broader literary consequences of translation choices. Using these three perspectives together reduces the risk of relying on a single criterion such as literal fidelity or fluency. It also makes the analysis better suited to literary translation, where meaning is layered and cannot be reduced to one dimension alone. Reliability is supported through consistent application of the same analytic questions to each example: What is the figurative source image? What strategy does the human translator use? What strategy does Gemini 3.6 Flash use? What is gained, what is lost, and what is shifted in tone or implication?

The methodological scope is limited in several ways. The study focuses on a single novel, so the findings are not intended to represent all Arabic literary translation or all AI systems. It also evaluates one AI model, Gemini 3.6 Flash, rather than comparing multiple AI systems. Nevertheless, the design is strong for the paper's purpose because it allows close and controlled comparison of translation behavior in a specific literary and postcolonial context. Since the research question concerns figurative translation in a culturally dense novel, close reading is more appropriate than broad corpus statistics. The resulting analysis is therefore best understood as an interpretive case study that aims to illuminate patterns, not as a general-purpose benchmark.

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1 Metaphors of Identity and Traditions

This section examines translations that rely heavily on horse imagery, kinship language, and culturally loaded rural expression. The main concern is how each rendering handles figurative meaning, cultural specificity, and narrative force in a way that remains readable in English while still preserving the symbolic world of the source text. Equivalence theory helps evaluate whether the translation preserves meaning at the word, collocation, textual, and pragmatic levels. Venuti's framework helps distinguish between foreignizing renderings that retain the source image and domesticating renderings that explain or replace it. Baker's narrative theory is also useful because these expressions are not isolated phrases; they help build the novel's symbolic and ideological universe.

Source Text (ST):	ألم تعرف أن سرقة الفرس مثل سرقة الروح. (Nasrallah, p. 10)
Human Translation (HT):	"Don't you know that to steal a mare is tantamount to stealing someone's soul?" (Roberts, p. 12)
Gemini Translation (GT):	"Didn't you know that stealing a kick is like stealing the soul?"

The human translation correctly identifies الفرس as “mare” and preserves the equine image that gives the proverb its cultural force. Gemini 3.6 Flash misreads the word as “kick,” which destroys the metaphor entirely and produces a nonsensical English phrase. In Baker’s terms, the human version achieves word-level and pragmatic equivalence, while the AI version fails at the lexical level and cannot reproduce the intended figurative meaning. Venuti’s framework also clarifies the difference: the human translation is foreignizing because it retains the culturally specific horse image, while the AI translation is not simply domesticating but mistaken. Narratively, the human version keeps the link between horses and honor central to the text, whereas the AI version breaks that symbolic connection. This example shows that AI translation can fail when a single lexical misreading carries the entire figurative meaning. The human translation is clearly superior because it preserves both the literal image and the cultural logic of the expression.

- ST: فضحتك الأصيلة. قال له. (Nasrallah, p. 10)
 HT: The thoroughbred has exposed you for what you are,” Khaled said to him. (Roberts, p.12)
 GT: “The noble woman exposed you,” he told him.

The human translator correctly preserves the horse-based metaphor by rendering الأصيلة as “thoroughbred,” while Gemini 3.6 Flash incorrectly turns it into “noble woman.” This is not a minor difference: it changes the entire referential field of the sentence and removes the equine insult that is central to the expression. The human translation keeps the metaphor intact and produces an English sentence that is both understandable and stylistically effective. From the perspective of equivalence, the AI version fails at both the word level and the textual level, while the human version retains the source image and the intended insult. In narrative terms, the human translation preserves the novel’s horse-centered symbolic universe, while the AI translation does not. This is a strong example of semantic failure in AI translation. The human version is more accurate, more literary, and more faithful to the cultural function of the source expression.

- ST: أمسكت بحطتي البيضاء ورفعتها ببندقيتي وصحت: عرب، عرب (Nasrallah, p. 315)
 HT: I took my white keffiyeh and raised it up on my rifle, shouting, “Arabs! Arabs!” (Roberts, p.347)
 GT: “I grabbed my white keffiyeh, raised it on my rifle, and shouted, ‘Arabs! Arabs!’”

This expression is culturally and politically dense because the white keffiyeh raised on a rifle is a strong symbol of collective identity and resistance. Gemini 3.6 Flash at least preserves the central action and symbolic gesture, even if it remains largely literal. That literalness works better here than in some other cases because the image itself is visible and culturally meaningful in English. However, Gemini still does not deepen the political resonance of the gesture. In Baker’s narrative terms, the image is preserved, but the wider meaning of resistance and solidarity is only partially conveyed. The output succeeds at image retention but remains limited in cultural interpretation. This case shows that AI can preserve a visible symbol, but it does not fully carry the ideological and emotional weight attached to it in the source culture.

- ST: جئنا نطلب الفرب منكم طالبيين مهرتكم لخالد ابن الحاج محمود (Nasrallah, p. 25)
 HT: “We’ve come to ask the hand of your filly for Khaled Hajj Mahmud’s son.” (Roberts, p.18)
 GT: “We have come to request a marriage alliance with you, asking for your daughter’s hand for Khalid, the son of Hajj Mahmoud.”

The human translator keeps the horse-related metaphor by rendering مهرتكم as “your filly,” preserving the source image and its rural-cultural tone. Gemini 3.6 Flash replaces the image with a direct paraphrase, “your daughter’s hand,” which is immediately clear to English readers but loses the metaphorical texture and the cultural flavor of the original. In Venuti’s terms, the human version is more foreignizing, while the AI version is more domesticating. In Baker’s terms, Gemini preserves the general function of the statement but loses part of the source text’s figurative and social resonance. This is a good example of the trade-off between clarity and cultural texture. The AI version is easier to understand, but the human version is richer in literary and cultural terms.

4.2 Threat, Oath, and Emotional Intensification

This section brings together expressions that intensify speech through warning, oath, exaggeration, or emotional pressure. These items are especially significant because they show how Arabic literary dialogue often relies on forceful verbal rhythm and culturally embedded formulas to express urgency, anger, affection, or social authority. The key question is whether the human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash preserve the emotional force of the source utterance while still producing natural English. Through equivalence theory, the focus falls on whether the translator preserves the pragmatic force of the utterance rather

than only its literal wording. Through Venuti's framework, the issue becomes whether the translator keeps the culturally marked intensity of the source or smooths it into a more familiar English expression. Baker's narrative theory is useful because these expressions often shape character voice and the emotional atmosphere of the scene.

- ST: (Nasrallah, p. 10) أنجُ بدمك قبل غروب هذه الشمس. وإلا سنطعمك للكلاب.
HT: Run for your life now, before the sun sets. Otherwise we'll feed you to the dogs! (Roberts, p.12)
GT "Run for your life before this sun sets. Otherwise, we will feed you to the dogs."

The human translation renders the warning in natural English and preserves the threatening force of the original. Gemini 3.6 Flash keeps the core meaning but produces a slightly stiffer phrase with "this sun sets," which sounds less idiomatic than the human version. In Baker's terms, both translations preserve the basic propositional meaning, but the human version achieves stronger pragmatic equivalence because it conveys urgency more naturally. Venuti's framework shows that the human translation domesticates the warning just enough to make it fluent in English, while Gemini remains closer to the source structure without improving the literary effect. Narratively, the human version sounds like forceful speech in a tense scene, while Gemini's version sounds more mechanical. This is a case where both versions are understandable, but the human translation is more effective because it preserves the emotional pressure and urgency of the original utterance.

- ST: (Nasrallah, p. 10) صاح به خالد: لا ستر لمن لا يستر حرة.
HT: There's no protection for someone who does nothing to protect a free spirit. (Roberts, p.12)
GT "Khalid shouted at him, 'There is no cover for someone who fails to protect a free woman's honor.'"

The human translation softens the culturally specific term حرة into "free spirit," while Gemini 3.6 Flash makes the honor code more explicit by rendering it as "a free woman's honor." The human version is smoother in English and captures the general ethical force, but it partially domesticates the cultural concept. The AI version is more literal in meaning but less natural in phrasing. In Baker's terms, the human translation achieves better textual flow, while the AI translation retains more of the source's social logic but at the cost of fluency. Venuti's framework shows a split strategy: the human version leans toward domesticating readability, and Gemini leans toward foreignizing explanation. Narratively, both maintain the pressure of the utterance, but they frame the social value differently. This example shows that literalness is not always the best solution. Gemini preserves the honor meaning more explicitly, but the human translator produces a more elegant and readable sentence.

- ST: (Nasrallah, pp. 17-18) علي الطلاق إنها أحلى من الشمس والقمر.
HT: "If she isn't more beautiful than both the sun and the moon, I'll divorce her!" Roberts, p.21)
GT "By the triple divorce, she is more beautiful than the sun and the moon!"

The human translation turns the oath into a conditional statement that sounds natural in English while preserving the hyperbole. Gemini 3.6 Flash retains the culturally specific oath more literally, which keeps the original intensity but makes the phrase less idiomatic for English readers. In Baker's model, both preserve the core meaning, but the human version achieves stronger pragmatic and textual equivalence. From Venuti's perspective, the human version domesticates the oath just enough to function in English, while Gemini foreignizes the phrase more directly. Narratively, both convey admiration, but the human version sounds more like fluent literary dialogue. This is a case where the AI output keeps the cultural marker of the oath, but the human translation better balances intensity and English readability.

- ST: (Nasrallah, p. 19) وانفطرت مسبحة الكلام.
HT: "And once he'd begun to speak, there was no stopping the torrent of words that followed." Roberts, p.23)
GT "And the string of words snapped open."

The human translator converts the prayer-bead image into the idiomatic English phrase "torrent of words," which successfully preserves the idea of unstoppable speech. Gemini 3.6 Flash translates the image more literally, but the result is awkward and only partially comprehensible. In Baker's terms, the human version achieves dynamic equivalence at the pragmatic level, while Gemini remains trapped at the level of literal image retention. Venuti's framework again shows that the human version domesticates the expression in a productive way, while the AI version over-literalizes it. Narratively, the human translation preserves the fluent movement of speech, whereas the AI translation interrupts it. This is one of the clearest examples of the human translator's advantage. The AI output is technically close to the image but far from the intended literary effect.

4.3 Political and Historical Reference

This section focuses on expressions that carry explicit political, historical, and cultural significance. Unlike more purely idiomatic or descriptive figurative language, these items are tied directly to land, authority, identity, and inherited social meaning. The central question is whether the human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash preserve the historical specificity and ideological weight of these references while still producing readable English. Equivalence theory helps determine whether meaning is retained at the lexical, textual, and pragmatic levels. Venuti's framework is useful because politically marked expressions often require either a foreignizing choice that preserves historical specificity or a domesticating choice that makes the reference more immediately accessible. Baker's narrative theory is also important here because these references do not merely describe events; they help narrate who belongs, who has power, and how the novel constructs Palestinian historical memory.

ST: هذه الأرض لكم ما داموا برفضون الانضمام اليها. . . لقد ذهبت الى الانجليز بنفسى، فقالوا لي: اذا كانت هذه الأرض لهم فاحضروا الكواشين. (Nasralla, pp. 33-34)

HT: "Al-Hamdi said to his men, 'As long as they refuse to join us, this land belongs to you.' Hajj Mahmud went to see Father Theodorus. 'So is this the protection you were talking about?' he demanded. 'I went myself to see the British, and they told me, 'If these lands belong to them, then let them bring the deeds that prove it.'"' (Roberts, pp. 294-295); "...this land has belonged to me since the time of my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, and his father before him. And everyone knows it!" (Roberts, pp.41-42)

GT This land is yours as long as they refuse to join us. . . . I went to the British myself, and they told me: 'If this land belongs to them, bring the title deeds

The human translation expands the passage and makes the land dispute historically and legally explicit. By rendering الكواشين as "deeds that prove it," it preserves the legal force of the original and ties the land to historical ownership, inheritance, and authority. Gemini 3.6 Flash also preserves the basic meaning by translating الكواشين as "title deeds," but the version provided is truncated and less fully integrated into the larger narrative context. In Baker's terms, the human translation achieves stronger textual and pragmatic equivalence because it clarifies the historical conflict surrounding land ownership. Venuti's framework suggests that the human version balances foreignness and readability more effectively, while the AI version remains closer to a functional gloss. Narratively, the human translation makes land appear not as a neutral property term but as part of a long historical struggle. This example shows that the human translator is better able to embed the legal and historical significance of land in the narrative, while the AI version remains more schematic.

ST: كان لاسمها وقعه، وبدت في أعين الكثيرين اقرب لكائنات الاساطير منها الى البشر. عفيفة ومنزهة كسيدتنا مريم وقوية الارادة كزيتونة معمرة. (Nasrallah, p. 292)

HT: "Her name had a weight to it, and to many people she seemed more like a legend than a real live person. She was as chaste and flawless as our Lady the Virgin Mary, and as strong-willed as a long-lived olive tree." Roberts, p.324)

GT "Her name had a captivating resonance, and in the eyes of many, she seemed closer to a legendary creature than a human being. Chaste and exalted was our master Maryam, and as strong-willed as an ancient, deep-rooted olive tree."

The human translation preserves the religious and symbolic texture of the source by retaining the Virgin Mary reference and the olive tree image in a form that is readable and evocative in English. Gemini 3.6 Flash also keeps the imagery, but its phrase "our master Maryam" is less natural and slightly distorts the religious tone. In Baker's terms, the human version maintains stronger pragmatic and textual equivalence because it balances source imagery with English fluency. Venuti's framework shows that the human version is selectively foreignizing, while the AI version is more literal but less stylistically controlled. Narratively, both preserve the symbolic richness of the description, but the human translation better sustains its literary rhythm. The human translation is more polished and culturally balanced, while Gemini's version retains the imagery but sounds less natural and less literary.

ST: توقفت الفرس أمامهم، أشبه بصخرة. (Nasrallah, p.9)

HT: The mare came to a halt in front of them, still as a stone. (Roberts, p.11)

GT "The mare stopped in front of them, resembling a rock."

The human translation converts the simile into idiomatic English with “still as a stone,” which preserves the force and naturalness of the image. Gemini 3.6 Flash renders the phrase more literally as “resembling a rock,” which is understandable but less elegant and less literary. In Baker’s framework, the human version achieves a stronger pragmatic effect because it recreates the original comparison in a way that works fluently in English. Venuti’s distinction is also visible here: the human translation domesticates the form while preserving the image, whereas Gemini keeps the image more directly but with less stylistic refinement. Narratively, the human translation is more effective in sustaining the scene’s visual stillness. This is a relatively small difference in meaning, but a clear difference in literary quality. The human version is smoother and more effective in English.

- ST: ما الذي تقولينه يا امرأة؟! هؤلاء لن يعطونا حتى معزة لو كانت لديهم، فما بالك بابتئهم! (Nasrallah, p.14)
- HT: “What are you saying, woman? These folks wouldn’t even give us a shegoat if they had one. And you expect them to give us their daughter?” (Roberts, p.17)
- GT: “What on earth are you saying, woman?! These people wouldn’t even give us a goat if they had one, let alone their daughter!”

The human translation preserves the rural specificity of معزة by using “shegoat,” which keeps the local and colloquial flavor of the original speech. Gemini 3.6 Flash generalizes this to “goat,” which is accurate in a broad sense but less culturally textured. In Baker’s terms, the human translation retains a stronger lexical and sociocultural equivalence because the gendered noun matters in the source context. Venuti’s framework suggests that the human version is more foreignizing, while the AI version domesticates the expression by reducing its local flavor. Narratively, the human translation better reflects the speaker’s voice and rural social setting. This example shows how a small lexical choice can carry cultural significance. The human version is richer because it preserves the local speech texture.

4.4 Symbolic Narrative Imagery

This section examines expressions that do more than describe events; they shape the atmosphere, symbolism, and narrative movement of the text. These items are important because they often carry layered meaning through image, rhythm, and cultural association, even when their literal wording appears straightforward. Equivalence theory helps determine whether the translation preserves the image at the word and pragmatic levels. Venuti’s framework clarifies whether the translation keeps the source image visible or replaces it with a more familiar English phrasing. Baker’s narrative theory is especially useful here because these expressions contribute directly to the novel’s symbolic structure and to the way readers understand identity, action, and memory.

- ST: تطلعت كتلة الضوء الى الأعلى وراحت تُطلق صهيلها المجروح. عند ذلك صاح الحاج محمود: يا رجال. هنالك حرة تستغيث. أجيروها. (Nasrallah, p. 9)
- HT: "Her head upturned, the mass of light began emitting a pained whinny, at which point Hajj Mahmud shouted, 'Men! There's a free spirit calling for help! Take her under your protection!'" (Roberts, p.11)
- GT: The mass of light gazed upward and began to unleash its wounded neigh. At that, Hajj Mahmoud cried out, "O men, a noble woman is seeking refuge. Protect her!"

The human translation preserves the horse imagery while also making the symbolic meaning of حرة readable as “free spirit.” Gemini 3.6 Flash keeps the horse imagery as well, but shifts the phrase toward “a noble woman,” which is more explicit but less poetic. In Baker’s terms, both translations retain the basic image, but the human version achieves stronger pragmatic equivalence because it conveys the emotional urgency and symbolic openness of the source text. Venuti’s framework shows that the human version is more selectively foreignizing, while the AI version is somewhat explanatory and more overtly domesticating. Narratively, the human translation keeps the scene lyrical and emotionally charged, while the AI version sounds more literal and less literary. This is one of the cases where both versions preserve the main image, but the human translation is more effective because it keeps the symbolic ambiguity and emotional force of the original.

- ST: وبعد جولة طويلة على ظهر الجمل أراد النزول، ولكنه نسي الكلمة التي يجب أن يقال للجمل كي يتوقف ويركع: (إخت). وبدلاً منها راح يردد: (حيت) فواصل الجمل مسيراً حتى وصل به إلى قرية عَجُور. (Nasrallah, p.25)
- HT: It was also the first time he'd had the chance to see the world from such an unaccustomed elevation. After riding around for quite a while, he decided he wanted to get down. However, he'd forgotten the magic word. So, instead of saying “Ikht!,” which was the word he was supposed to use in order to get the camel to stop and kneel, he kept saying “Heet!,” in response to which the camel continued on its way, until he ended up in the village of Ajjur! (Roberts, p.32)

- GT "After a long ride on the camel's back, he wanted to dismount, but he forgot the word that must be said to make the camel stop and kneel: (*lkh*). Instead, he kept repeating (*Heet*), so the camel kept walking until it brought him to the village of Ajour."

The human translation expands the anecdote and preserves its comic storytelling quality. Gemini 3.6 Flash keeps the basic sequence of events but simplifies the scene and slightly distorts the command forms. In Baker's terms, the human version achieves stronger textual and pragmatic equivalence because it preserves not only meaning but also narrative rhythm and humor. Venuti's framework shows that the human translation is more foreignizing in a productive sense, since it explains the cultural logic without flattening it, while the AI version remains close to the source structure but lacks literary vitality. Narratively, the human version retains the charm of the episode, while the AI version reads more like a plain report of events. This example shows that narrative style matters as much as lexical accuracy. The human translator preserves the humor and movement of the original, while the AI output is flatter.

- ST: طار خبر تعيينه ليعبر حقول وبيارات وكروم المنطقة كلها، طارحاً الأبواب بعنف. (Nasrallah, p.45)
 HT: Flying over the fields, the orchards, and the vineyards of the entire area, the news of his appointment came pounding violently on their doors. (Roberts, p.56)
 GT "The news of his appointment flew across the fields, citrus groves, and vineyards of the entire area, knocking violently on every door."

The human translation preserves the metaphor of news moving through space while also giving the sentence a strong rhythm. Gemini 3.6 Flash remains close to the source image and is understandable, but its phrasing is less elegant and less integrated. In Baker's terms, both preserve the basic figurative structure, but the human translation offers more effective pragmatic and textual equivalence. Venuti's framework shows that the human version domesticates the sentence slightly for natural English flow while keeping the image, whereas the AI version stays more literal. Narratively, the human translation sounds more literary and atmospheric. This is a case where both versions communicate the image, but the human version better preserves the movement and style of the source text.

- ST: رأته يرفع الصحن فصرخت: الحق يا حاج إنك قبل أن يُكسر لنا البيت!! (Nasrallah, p.13)
 HT: she shouted, "Hajj Mahmudo something about your son before he breaks the whole house!" (Roberts, p.16)
 GT "She saw him lift the dish and screamed, 'Stop him, Hajj, before he breaks our house down!'"

The human translation supplied here appears unstable in the text, while Gemini 3.6 Flash produces a clearer and more coherent sentence. The central metaphor concerns the household as a site of disruption, and both versions preserve that general sense. In Baker's model, the AI version actually achieves better textual clarity, even if it is not stylistically perfect. Venuti's framework suggests that Gemini domesticates the expression into a straightforward English warning, while the human version remains incomplete and less controlled. Narratively, the AI version is more effective as an English sentence, though it does not fully preserve the compact force of the original Arabic. This is one of the few cases where the AI output is more coherent than the supplied human version. It shows that machine translation can sometimes outperform a flawed human rendering at the level of surface clarity.

- ST: وحين نقول (بنا) تقصد عالماً خلفنا تمثله الكنيسة، ولتعلموا تعرفون أن الباب العالي هو الذي يختار مطران القدس، ومنذ زمن طويل. (Nasrallah, p.6)
 HT: And when we say 'because of us,' we mean an entire world that backs us, a world represented by the Church. Perhaps you know that, for many years now, the Ottoman Sultan has chosen the Archbishop of Jerusalem from among the clerics of our denomination. (Roberts, p.20)
 GT "And when we say 'us,' we mean a world behind us represented by the Church, and you should know that the Sublime Porte has long been the one that chooses the Metropolitan of Jerusalem."

The human translation explains the political-religious structure more fully and makes the reference easier to follow for English readers. Gemini 3.6 Flash preserves the historical term الباب العالي as "the Sublime Porte," which is historically accurate and more foreignizing, but less integrated into the literary flow. In Baker's terms, the human version gives stronger pragmatic clarity, while the AI version retains more historical specificity. Venuti's framework shows a clear difference in orientation: the human version

is more domesticating and explanatory, while the AI version is more foreignizing and archival. Narratively, the human translation is smoother, but the AI version retains the formal historical marker more directly. This example shows the basic trade-off between readability and historical specificity. The human translation is easier to follow, while the AI version keeps the institutional term more visibly foreign.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study compared human translation and Gemini 3.6 Flash in rendering metaphor and idiom in postcolonial Arabic literature, focusing on selected examples from *The Time of White Horses*. The analysis showed that figurative language in the novel carries cultural memory, social identity, political meaning, and narrative force, so translation affects much more than semantic content alone. Across the examples examined, the human translation generally preserved figurative force, pragmatic effect, and literary rhythm more successfully than Gemini 3.6 Flash, which often remained closer to surface wording and sometimes weakened the source text's symbolic and cultural depth.

The comparison also confirmed that equivalence in literary translation must be understood at more than one level. The human translator usually achieved stronger dynamic equivalence, especially when a literal rendering would have sounded unnatural or failed to carry the intended effect. Gemini 3.6 Flash could often preserve basic meaning, and in some cases even retain visible imagery, but it was less consistent at the pragmatic and textual levels. This is important in a postcolonial novel, where metaphor and idiom are not decorative extras but central carriers of identity, resistance, and collective memory.

Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization helped explain the different translation patterns. The human translator moved flexibly between preserving source imagery and adapting expression for English readability, while Gemini 3.6 Flash more often defaulted to literal rendering or explanatory paraphrase without fully controlling the literary result. At times this kept the foreign image visible; at other times it produced awkward or partially distorted English. In a postcolonial context, such shifts matter because the translation may either sustain or weaken the cultural specificity of the source text.

Baker's narrative theory was especially helpful in showing that translation choices shape the way English readers encounter the novel's world. The translations did not merely transfer words; they framed how readers understand land, honor, kinship, protection, masculinity, and resistance. When the human translation preserved the figurative expression effectively, the narrative force of the scene remained strong. When Gemini 3.6 Flash over-literalized or simplified the expression, that force was often reduced. The study therefore shows that translation is not only a linguistic act but also a narrative and ideological one.

5.1 Implications

The main implication of this study is that AI translation tools should not be treated as replacements for human literary translators in postcolonial Arabic fiction. Gemini 3.6 Flash may be useful for drafting, lexical support, or preliminary interpretation, but it cannot yet be relied on to preserve figurative depth, cultural nuance, and narrative force with the consistency required for literary publication. Human translators remain essential because they can recognize when a cultural image should be preserved, when it should be adapted, and when the target language requires a more creative reformulation.

For translation practice, the findings suggest that a hybrid workflow is the most realistic model. AI can assist with first drafts and rough equivalents, but human translators should retain final responsibility for figurative language, religious reference, emotionally charged idioms, and politically loaded expressions. Editors and publishers should also assess literary translations using criteria that go beyond fluency, including cultural visibility, metaphorical force, tone, and narrative coherence. A translation can sound smooth and still fail to carry the symbolic weight of the source text.

For theory, the study reinforces the usefulness of combining equivalence theory, domestication and foreignization, and narrative theory. No single framework is sufficient on its own. Equivalence theory explains the linguistic level of transfer, Venuti explains the cultural direction of the translation, and Baker explains the broader narrative consequences. Together, they provide a more complete account of literary translation in postcolonial contexts.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research should compare Gemini 3.6 Flash with professional human translation across a wider range of Arabic novels and genres. A broader corpus would help determine whether the patterns observed here are specific to *The Time of White*

Horses or general to postcolonial Arabic fiction. Further studies should also compare Gemini with other AI systems to see whether some models handle metaphor and idiom better than others.

Future work should include reader-response testing to examine how different translations affect English readers' understanding of the text. It would also be useful to investigate whether prompt design, post-editing, or fine-tuning can improve AI handling of figurative Arabic language. In addition, researchers should examine whether AI systems can preserve the interaction between metaphor, idiom, and postcolonial identity, or whether this remains a distinctly human task.

Finally, translators working with Arabic literary texts should be encouraged to use AI cautiously and critically. AI may support productivity, but it should not be allowed to flatten cultural difference or replace interpretive judgment. In postcolonial literary translation, the preservation of meaning depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on sensitivity to history, memory, and narrative voice.

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