



An Analysis of Indonesian Idiom Translation in Sapardi Djoko Damono's Novel Hujan Bulan Juni by ChatGPT and Gemini

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-08-25 Keywords: <i>ChatGPT; equivalence; Gemini; idiom translation; translation strategies</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11702 Corresponding Author: Ni Putu Rahayu Nindya Ningsih rahayunindya13@gmail.com English Literature, Faculty of Foreign Language, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar	<i>This research notes that despite the growing use of Large Language Models in translation, empirical research comparing how different AI systems apply specific translation strategies to handle culture-bound literary idioms remains limited. To address this gap, this research examined how ChatGPT and Gemini translate Indonesian idioms into English and analyzed how their strategies contributed to maintaining semantic equivalence. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, analyzing twenty-three idiomatic expressions extracted from Sapardi Djoko Damono's novel Hujan Bulan Juni as the primary source. The data were evaluated using Baker's (2018) idiom translation framework, which was selected over alternative translation models due to its exceptionally comprehensive and systematic taxonomy in mapping both structural and functional equivalence across cross-cultural linguistic transfers. Emphasizing a comparative analysis of translation strategies rather than mere translation quality, the findings revealed that both ChatGPT and Gemini predominantly used translation by paraphrase, followed by maintaining similar meaning with different forms, as well as preserving both meaning and form. Translation by omission, however, was not detected at any point during the data analysis. The results also showed that ChatGPT tended to prioritize semantic clarity through paraphrase, whereas Gemini more frequently used equivalent English idioms. Both AI systems generally achieved semantic equivalence, although some cultural and figurative nuances were not fully preserved. Ultimately, this research contributes significantly to the field of AI-assisted literary</i>

translation by providing empirical insights into the methodological behaviors of generative AI models in handling figurative language.

1. Introduction

Translation is fundamental in facilitating intercultural communication by converting source language (SL) content into a target language (TL). Central to this process is equivalence, which extends far beyond lexical correspondence to encompass semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, and cultural dimensions (Baker, 2018). Achieving this becomes exceptionally complex when encountering idioms fixed sequences whose overall meaning cannot be deduced directly from individual constituent definitions (Baker, 2018). Unlike idioms in many Western languages that often share familiar Greco-Roman metaphorical roots, Indonesian idioms are deeply embedded in localized cultural philosophies, indigenous social norms, and traditional relational concepts. Consequently, literal renderings of Indonesian idioms frequently lead to severe semantic distortion and total loss of cultural significance.

This challenge is profoundly magnified in literary translation, where language transcends mere information transfer to function as an aesthetic, emotional, and expressive vehicle. Literary translation demands the meticulous preservation of dimensions that safeguard cultural identity, as literary works serve as vital archives of societal values and collective heritage (Bassnett, 2014). Within Indonesian literature, Sapardi Djoko Damono's novel *Hujan Bulan Juni* offers a rich corpus laden with culturally embedded expressions of high artistic value. To resolve disparities between source and target systems, translators rely on problem-solving mechanisms known as translation strategies (Baker, 2018; Latief, Khaerana, & Soraya, 2022).

Among existing models, Baker's framework serves as the primary analytical tool because its systematic categorization provides the most robust taxonomy for mapping how cross-cultural transfers navigate syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic layers (Baker, 2018).

In contemporary digital landscapes, Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and Gemini have transformed translation workflows through rapid, context-aware text generation (Dobrotă, 2025; Zhang, Li, & Wu, 2025). While recent investigations demonstrate that LLMs can rival traditional machine translation systems in general tasks (Hendy et al., 2023; Zebaze, Sagot, & Bawden, 2025), literary narratives remain a formidable obstacle. Because AI outputs are generated through statistical pattern prediction rather than genuine cultural cognition (Azizov, 2025), automated systems consistently struggle with stylistic complexity, emotional resonance, and culture-specific intricacies (Moulavinafchi, Madahiian, & Maryam Hosseini, 2025; Obeidat, Haider, Tair, & Sahari, 2024; Ohod Faisal Ahmed, Ida Kusuma Dewi, & Mohammad Yunus Anis, 2025).

While previous literature widely documents general AI-assisted workflows (Fu & Liu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025), critical syntheses reveal a distinct limitation: most studies focus narrowly on general translation accuracy rather than the systematic methodologies used to achieve equivalence. Furthermore, empirical evidence directly comparing how ChatGPT and Gemini handle Indonesian literary idioms using established frameworks remains absent. To bridge this gap, this research critically contrasts the methodological approaches utilized by ChatGPT and Gemini in translating idioms from *Hujan Bulan Juni*. Specifically, this study identifies dominant platform strategies and evaluates how these models establish semantic and functional equivalence. Theoretically, this research enriches translation studies by providing empirical insights into the behavioral patterns of generative models in literary contexts, while practically offering valuable guidance for educators and translators navigating cultural barriers in AI-assisted creative writing.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to investigate the translation strategies used by ChatGPT and Gemini in translating Indonesian idiomatic expressions into English. Qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals or groups interpret social and human issues by examining meanings within their real-life contexts and interpreting participants' experiences (W.Creswell, 2014). The data consisted of twenty-three Indonesian idiomatic expressions identified from Sapardi Djoko Damono's novel *Hujan Bulan Juni* and their English translations generated by ChatGPT and Gemini.

The data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. First, the researchers read the novel repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, cultural nuances, and narrative contexts. Subsequently, idiomatic expressions and their contextual sentences were identified, recorded, and categorized systematically. The identification process focused on expressions whose meanings could not be interpreted literally from their constituent words and therefore required contextual interpretation. The selected idiomatic expressions were validated based on the characteristics of Indonesian idioms and by examining their contextual meanings in the novel to ensure that they represented genuine idiomatic expressions rather than literal expressions (Khak' & Sari, 2011).

From the collected data, twenty-three idiomatic expressions were selected because they represented various types of culture-bound figurative expressions occurring in different narrative contexts throughout the novel. Although the dataset consisted of only twenty-three idioms, it was considered sufficient because qualitative research emphasizes analytical depth rather than statistical representativeness. The selected idioms provided adequate variation to identify and compare the translation strategies employed by both AI systems (W.Creswell, 2014).

To ensure the reproducibility of the translation procedure, the same prompt was used consistently for both ChatGPT and Gemini throughout the data collection process. Each AI system was instructed to identify the Indonesian idiomatic expression in the selected quotation from the novel, translate the quotation into natural English while preserving the meaning of the idiomatic expression, and classify the translation according to one of the four idiom translation strategies proposed by Baker. The prompt used in this study is presented below (Baker, 2018).

Identify the Indonesian idiomatic expression in the following quotation from *Hujan Bulan Juni* by Sapardi Djoko Damono. Translate the quotation into natural English while preserving the meaning of the idiomatic expression. Then classify the translation strategy used into one of the following categories: (1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form, (2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, (3) translation by paraphrase, or (4) translation by omission.

The classifications generated by ChatGPT and Gemini were not adopted directly. Instead, they were independently reviewed and verified by the researcher based on Baker's idiom translation framework. Each AI-generated classification was manually compared with the theoretical definitions of the four idiom translation strategies before the final coding was determined. Any inconsistencies or ambiguities identified during the verification process were carefully examined and resolved based on the contextual meaning of the idiomatic expression in the source text. Both AI systems were accessed through their publicly available versions at the time of data collection using their default settings without additional customization or parameter adjustment. The same prompt, contextual sentences, and translation procedures were consistently applied to both systems to ensure comparability throughout the analysis. In addition, all translations were collected within the same period using identical prompts and procedures to minimize variations in AI-generated outputs (Baker, 2018).

A translation content analysis approach was applied to analyze the data. The analysis began by comparing each Indonesian idiomatic expression with the English translations produced by ChatGPT and Gemini. The translation strategies initially identified by the AI systems were subsequently verified by the researcher before being included in the findings. The final classifications were grouped into four categories: (1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form, (2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, (3) translation by paraphrase, and (4) translation by omission. Finally, the findings were interpreted to compare how ChatGPT and Gemini applied the four translation strategies when translating Indonesian idiomatic expressions into English. The results were presented in frequency tables, coding tables, and descriptive explanations to facilitate a comprehensive comparison of the translation strategies employed by ChatGPT and Gemini (Baker, 2018).

Table 1 presents examples of the coding and verification procedure employed in this study. The initial translation strategies were first generated by ChatGPT and Gemini using the same prompt. Subsequently, each classification was independently reviewed and verified by the researcher according to Baker's idiom translation framework. The researcher-verified classifications were used as the final coding for data analysis and interpretation.

Table 1. Example of the Coding and Verification Process Based on Baker's (2018) Framework.

No	Indonesian Source text	ChatGPT Translation & Strategy	Gemini Translation & Strategy	Researcher-Verified Classification
1	“Tulisan Sarwono boleh dibilang menjadi pengisi tetap media cetak itu; apa saja ditulisnya, dari sepak bola sampai politik, sesuai dengan janji kepada dirinya sendiri untuk tidak tergantung kepada orang tuanya yang PNS, yang gajinya pas-pasan saja untuk menyelenggarakan hidup.” (p.2)	“Sarwono could be said to have become a regular contributor to the print media; he wrote about anything, from football to politics, in keeping with his promise to himself not to depend on his parents, who were civil servants with salaries that were just enough to get by. ” (Translation	“Sarwono's writing had become a regular fixture in that print media; he wrote about anything and everything, from football to politics, in keeping with a promise he made to himself: not to depend on his parents, who were civil servants with salaries that were hand to mouth to make ends meet.” (Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form)	Translation by Paraphrase.

		by Paraphrase)		
2	"la mulai menggigil. Ragu-ragu apa harus menunggu sampai hujan sama sekali reda atau nekat saja naik becak kembali ke hotel. la merasa makan buah simalakama, meskipun terus terang saja tidak tahu buah apa itu, Tapi kan sudah jadi pepatah." (p.7)	"He began to shiver. Unsure whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just go ahead and take a pedicab back to the hotel, he felt caught in a dilemma, even though, frankly, he didn't actually know what kind of fruit it was, but it had already become a proverb." (Translation by Paraphrase)	"He began to shiver. He hesitated whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just brave it and take a pedicab back to the hotel. He felt caught between a rock and a hard place, even though, to be honest, he had no idea what kind of place that was. But after all, it had already become a proverb." (Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form)	Translation by Paraphrase.
3	"la merasa lega bisa melepaskan diri dari situasi yang menyudutkannya itu, tetapi begitu sampai di ujung buntu	"He felt relieved to have freed herself from the situation that had cornered her, but once	"He felt relieved to have freed himself from the situation that had cornered him, but once he reached a dead end, his	Translation by similar meaning and form.

	jantungnya mulai terasa tidak teratur ketukannya. la menarik napas panjang, sangat panjang, mengupayakan ketenangan yang sebenarnya menjadi tenaga hidupnya." (p.95)	she reached a dead end , her heartbeat began to feel irregular. She took a long, very long breath, trying to regain the calm that was, in fact, her source of strength." (Translation by similar meaning and form)	heartbeat began to feel irregular. He took a long, very long breath, striving for the calmness that was, in fact, his life force." (Translation by Similar meaning and Form)	
4	"la ditugasi, dan kadang juga menuntut ditugasi, Kaprodi ikut dalam setidaknya dua penelitian sekaligus. Baginya Kegiatan penelitian lapangan yang bertubi-tubi itu diperlukannya untuk mengisi rekening BNI-nya, di samping moga-moga bisa membantu sejenak melupakan Pingkan. la tidak	"He was assigned and sometimes even insisted on being assigned by the head of the study program to take part in at least two research projects at once. For him, the back-to-back field research was	"He was assigned and sometimes even asked to be assigned by the head of the study program to take part in at least two research projects at once. For him, those back-to-back field studies were necessary to fill up his BNI account, and perhaps also to help him momentarily forget Pingkan. It turned out it was not one sided	Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form.

	bertepuk sebelah tangan ternyata.” (p.103)	necessary to build up his BNI account and, hopefully, to help him forget Pingkan for a while. It turned out his love was not unrequited after all.” (Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form)	love after all.” (Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form)	
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The coding and verification procedure employed in this study is exemplified in Table 1. Each translation was initially classified by ChatGPT and Gemini and subsequently verified by the researcher using Baker's idiom translation framework before being included in the final analysis (Baker, 2018).

3. Result

Analysis of Translation Strategy Frequency

This study identified twenty-three Indonesian idiomatic expressions from *Hujan Bulan Juni* by Sapardi Djoko Damono and analyzed their English translations generated by ChatGPT and Gemini using Baker's (2018) idiom translation framework. The findings revealed that both AI systems employed three of Baker's four idiom translation strategies: translation by paraphrase, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, and using an idiom of similar meaning and form. No instances of translation by omission were identified in either AI system (Baker, 2018).

Table 2. *Frequency of Translation Strategies Used by ChatGPT and Gemini*

Translation Strategies	ChatGPT	Gemini
Translation by Paraphrase	14 (60.9%)	12 (52.2%)
Using an Similar Meaning but Dissimilar form	7 (30.4%)	9 (39.1%)
Using an Similar Meaning and Form	2 (8.7%)	2 (8.7%)
Translation by Omission	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Total	23 (100%)	23 (100%)
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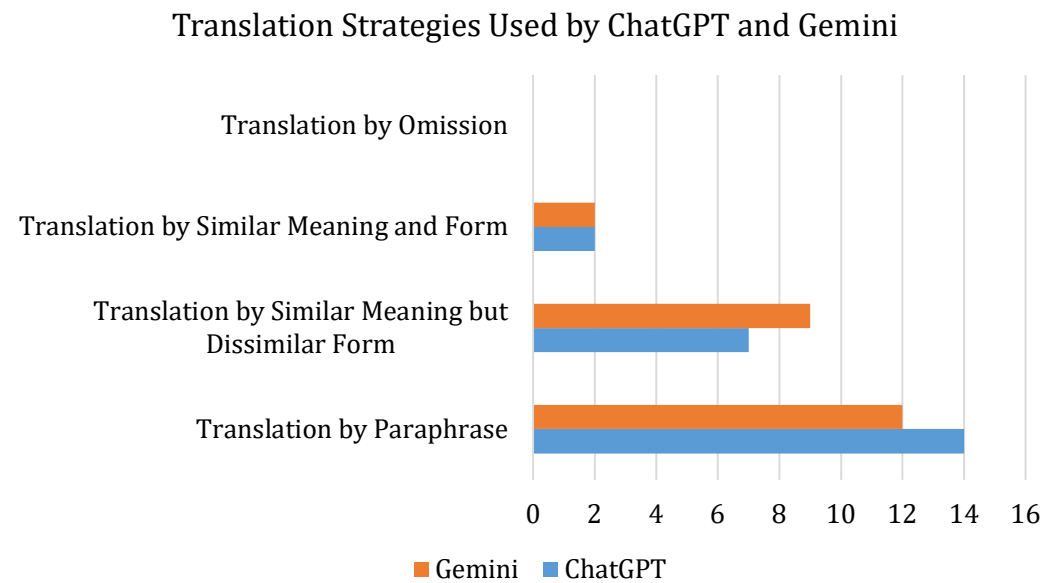


Figure 1. Comparison of Translation Strategies Used by ChatGPT and Gemini.

As presented in Table 2 and Figure 1, translation by paraphrase was the most frequently employed strategy by both AI systems. ChatGPT applied this strategy in fourteen idiomatic expressions (60.9%), while Gemini employed it in twelve idiomatic expressions (52.2%). The strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form was the second most frequently employed strategy, accounting for seven cases (30.4%) in ChatGPT and nine cases (39.1%) in Gemini. Meanwhile, the strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form occurred in only two idiomatic expressions (8.7%) in each AI system. No instances of translation by omission were identified in either ChatGPT or Gemini (Baker, 2018).

Table 3 summarizes the overall translation tendencies observed in ChatGPT and Gemini based on the frequency of Baker's (2018) idiom translation strategies.

Table 3. Overall Comparison of Translation Strategies Employed by ChatGPT and Gemini

Aspect	ChatGPT	Gemini
Dominant strategy	Translation by Paraphrase	Translation by Paraphrase
Most frequent strategy	14 (60.9%)	12 (52.2%)
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	2 (8.7%)	2 (8.7%)

Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	7 (30.4%)	9 (39.1%)
Translation by omission	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Main tendency	Prioritizes semantic clarity through explicit explanation	Preserves idiomatic characteristics more frequently
Main strenght	Produces clear and easily understandable translations	Produces more natural and idiomatic English expressions
Main limitation	Some translations become less idiomatic due to extensive paraphrasing	Some translations occasionally preserve meaning but reduce cultural nuances

The results indicate that both AI systems predominantly employed translation by paraphrase, followed by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. Although both systems applied the same three translation strategies, differences were observed in the frequency of each strategy. ChatGPT produced more paraphrased translations, whereas Gemini more frequently employed English idioms with similar meanings but different lexical forms. The strategy of using an idiom of similar meaning and form was identified only twice in each AI system, while translation by omission was not found in the dataset.

4. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the twenty-three Indonesian idiomatic expressions from *Hujan Bulan Juni* reveal distinct operational patterns in how ChatGPT and Gemini utilize Baker's (2018) translation strategies. Below is the detailed discussion of each translation strategy, incorporating excerpt analyses, quantitative distribution, and theoretical evaluation.

1. Translation by Paraphrase

Translation by paraphrase was the most frequently employed strategy by both ChatGPT and Gemini. ChatGPT applied this strategy in fourteen idiomatic expressions (60.9%), while Gemini employed it in twelve idiomatic expressions (52.2%). This strategy was used when no natural English idiom could adequately convey the intended meaning of the Indonesian expression. Instead of replacing the source idiom with another idiomatic expression, both AI systems expressed the meaning through ordinary lexical or descriptive expressions (Baker, 2018).

Excerpt 1

SL: "Tulisan Sarwono boleh dibilang menjadi pengisi tetap media cetak itu; apa saja ditulisnya, dari sepak bola sampai politik, sesuai dengan janji kepada dirinya sendiri untuk tidak tergantung kepada orang tuanya yang PNS, yang gajinya **pas-pasan** saja untuk menyelenggarakan hidup."

(Damono, 2015: 2)

TL (ChatGPT): "Sarwono could be said to have become a regular contributor to the print media, he wrote about anything, from football to politics, in keeping with his promise to himself not to depend on his parents, who were civil servants with salaries that were **just enough to get by**." (*Translation by Paraphrase*)

TL (Gemini AI): "Sarwono's writing had become a regular fixture in that print media; he wrote about anything and everything, from football to politics, in keeping with a promise he made to himself: not to depend on his parents, who were civil servants with salaries that were **hand to mouth** to make ends meet." (*Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form*)

One representative example is the idiom ***pas-pasan***. ChatGPT translated the expression as ***just enough to get by***, whereas Gemini rendered it as ***hand to mouth***. Although Gemini employed an English idiomatic expression, the final classification identified ChatGPT's translation as paraphrase because the expression explains the meaning directly without using an English idiom equivalent. Consequently, ChatGPT prioritizes functional transparency, while Gemini attempts to retain a figurative register.

Excerpt 2

SL: "Ia mulai menggigil. Ragu-ragu apa harus menunggu sampai hujan sama sekali reda atau nekat saja naik becak kembali ke hotel. Ia merasa ***makan buah simalakama***, meskipun terus terang saja tidak tahu buah apa itu. Tapi kan sudah jadi pepatah." (Damono, 2015: 7)

TL (Gemini AI): "He began to shiver. He hesitated whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just brave it and take a pedicab back to the hotel. He felt ***caught between a rock and a hard place***, even though, to be honest, he had no idea what kind of place that was. But after all, it had already become a proverb." (*Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form*)

TL (ChatGPT): "He began to shiver. Unsure whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just go ahead and take a pedicab back to the hotel, he felt ***caught in a dilemma***, even though, frankly, he didn't actually know what kind of fruit it was, but it had already become a proverb." (*Translation by Paraphrase*)

Another example is ***makan buah simalakama***. ChatGPT translated the idiom as ***caught in a dilemma***, explicitly conveying the intended meaning without preserving the figurative imagery of the original expression. While Gemini attempted a structural transposition into a Western equivalent (***caught between a rock and a hard place***), it inadvertently created minor local incoherence by mapping *buah* onto ***place***. In contrast, ChatGPT maintained absolute logical

consistency at the expense of literary imagery.

These examples indicate that paraphrasing enabled both AI systems to preserve the intended meaning of Indonesian idiomatic expressions while maintaining readability in English. However, this strategy also reduced the figurative and cultural characteristics embedded in the source language because the idiomatic imagery was replaced with explanatory expressions.

Synthesis

Overall, paraphrasing was the dominant strategy because it allowed both ChatGPT and Gemini to communicate the semantic meaning of Indonesian idioms accurately in contexts where equivalent English idioms were unavailable. Although this strategy sacrificed idiomatic flavor, it produced translations that were generally clear, natural, and comprehensible for English readers (Baker, 2018).

2. Translation by Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Form

Translation by similar meaning with dissimilar form was the second most frequent strategy, with Gemini applying it in nine idiomatic expressions (39.1%) and ChatGPT in seven idiomatic expressions (30.4%). This strategy occurs when a target-language idiom expresses a comparable meaning to the source expression through a distinct lexical configuration (Baker, 2018).

Excerpt 3

SL: "Ia mulai menggigil. Ragu-ragu apa harus menunggu sampai hujan sama sekali reda atau nekat saja naik becak kembali ke hotel. Ia merasa **makan buah simalakama**, meskipun terus-terang saja tidak tahu buah apa itu, Tapi kan sudah jadi pepatah." (Damono, 2015: 7)

TL (Gemini AI): "He began to shiver. He hesitated whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just brave it and take a pedicab back to the hotel. He felt caught **between a rock and a hard place**, even though, to be honest, he had no idea what kind of place that was. But after all, it had already become a proverb." (*Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form*)

TL (ChatGPT): "He began to shiver. Unsure whether to wait until the rain completely stopped or just go ahead and take a pedicab back to the hotel, he felt **caught in a dilemma**, even though, frankly, he didn't actually know what kind of fruit it was, but it had already become a proverb." (*Translation by Paraphrase*)

Excerpt 4

SL: "Gerombolan paman dan bibi Sarwono dari garis ayahnya yang datang ke perjamuan itu hampir semua banting stir dan langsung **tancap gas** menjadi pengusaha, tidak mau menjadi priayi yang mengganggu pekerjaan

semacam itu merendahkan derajat.” (Damono, 2015: 19)

TL (Gemini AI): “Almost all of Sarwono’s aunts and uncles from his father’s side who came to the feast had shifted gears and immediately **hit the ground running** to become entrepreneurs, refusing to be aristocrats who considered such work beneath their dignity.” (*Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form*)

TL (ChatGPT): “The group of Sarwono’s uncles and aunts from his father’s side who came to the gathering had almost all switched paths and **hit the ground running** into business, unwilling to become priyayi who considered such work beneath their status.” (*Translation by similar meaning but dissimilar form*)

In translating *tancap gas*, both AI engines successfully applied structural transposition by selecting the dynamic English idiom *hit the ground running*. This choice mirrors the high-energy register of the vehicular metaphor, indicating that both models recognize cross-linguistic metaphors when context is robustly established.

Synthesis

The high frequency of this strategy, particularly in Gemini's outputs, demonstrates that contemporary LLMs can move beyond literal descriptive translation toward functional equivalents when contextual parameters are strong. This aligns with prior research indicating that Large Language Models utilize iterative context mapping to match native metaphors to target-language conventions (Azizov, 2025; Hendy et al., 2023). Gemini's higher preference for this strategy reflects an optimization pathway favoring stylistic retention over plain prose.

3. Translation by Similar Meaning and Form

Translation by similar meaning and form was the least utilized active strategy, recorded in two instances (8.7%) for both ChatGPT and Gemini. Using idioms with similar meanings and forms involves selecting target-language idioms that share equivalent semantic meanings and similar lexical imagery with the source expressions (Baker, 2018).

Excerpt 5

SL: “Ia merasa lega bisa melepaskan diri dari situasi yang menyudutkannya itu, tetapi begitu sampai di **ujung buntu** jantungnya mulai terasa tidak teratur ketukannya. Ia menarik napas panjang, sangat panjang, mengupayakan ketenangan yang sebenarnya menjadi tenaga hidupnya.” (Damono, 2015: 95)

TL (Gemini AI): “He felt relieved to have freed himself from the situation that had cornered him, but once he reached a **dead end**, his heartbeat began

to feel irregular. He took a long, very long breath, striving for the calmness that was, in fact, his life force.” (*Translation by Similar meaning and Form*)

TL (ChatGPT): “He felt relieved to have freed herself from the situation that had cornered her, but once she reached a **dead end**, her heartbeat began to feel irregular. She took a long, very long breath, trying to regain the calm that was, in fact, her source of strength.” (*Translation by similar meaning and form*)

Excerpt 6

SL: “Pingkan pernah bilang bahwa ia telah ‘diprogram’ untuk menjadi **ujung tombak** kalau ada MOU antara universitasnya dan universitas di Jepang. Ketika mengucapkan kata diprogram itu Pingkan menunjukkan wajah yang agak mencong.” (Damono, 2015: 109)

TL (Gemini AI): “Pingkan once said that she had been ‘programmed’ to be the **spearhead** whenever there was an MOU between her university and universities in Japan. As she uttered the word ‘programmed,’ Pingkan made a slightly wry face.” (*Translation by Similar meaning and Form*)

TL (ChatGPT): “Pingkan once said that she had been ‘programmed’ to become **the spearhead** whenever there was an MOU between her university and a university in Japan. When she said the word ‘programmed,’ she made a slightly crooked expression.” (*Translation by Similar meaning and Form*)

Both systems seamlessly matched the idiom **ujung tombak** with **spearhead**, reflecting a shared cross-cultural conceptual image. Nonetheless, a stylistic divergence appears in rendering **wajah yang agak mencong**: Gemini selects **slightly wry face**, capturing a nuanced idiom-adjacent flavor, whereas ChatGPT uses **slightly crooked expression**, which is structurally more literal.

Synthesis

The low frequency of this strategy indicates that direct idiomatic equivalence between Indonesian and English is relatively uncommon due to cultural variations in metaphorical conceptualization (Baker, 2018). When a structural and conceptual metaphor crosses linguistic boundaries symmetrically, generative AI frameworks execute complete formal symmetry without losing aesthetic integrity; however, this remains the exception rather than the norm.

4. Translation by Omission

Translation by omission involves completely deleting an idiomatic expression or its figurative elements when the target language lacks a manageable equivalent

or when the omission does not seriously compromise the overall storyline (Baker, 2018).

Note on Data Findings: In this study, translation by omission recorded a frequency of 0% (0 cases) across both ChatGPT and Gemini outputs.

Synthesis

The total absence of omission indicates that neither AI model resorted to deleting complex or culture-bound idioms to bypass translation hurdles. Instead, both generative engines retained every structural unit containing an idiom, demonstrating a high level of semantic compliance and data retention. Rather than dropping difficult phrases, both systems consistently relied on meaning-preserving alternatives such as paraphrasing or functional substitution.

Theoretical Distinctions in Equivalence

The findings underscore a continuous, nuanced tension between semantic equivalence, functional equivalence, and stylistic equivalence (Baker, 2018). Semantic equivalence centers primarily on preserving the literal information load and referential meaning of the source text so that target readers can decode basic facts. Functional equivalence steps further by ensuring that a target expression achieves the same communicative or pragmatic effect as the source idiom, even if the underlying imagery shifts. Finally, stylistic equivalence governs the aesthetic, tonal, and register-bound alignment, ensuring that the poetic and literary texture of the narrative is preserved. ChatGPT consistently prioritized semantic and referential transparency, ensuring the message was decoded safely. Conversely, Gemini leaned more heavily toward functional and stylistic equivalence, seeking out target-language idioms that mirrored the expressive aesthetic of Sapardi Djoko Damono's prose.

Architectural and Optimization Explanations for AI Divergence

The structural performance variations observed between ChatGPT and Gemini can be traced directly to differing underlying LLM architectures, reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) alignment objectives, decoding temperature baselines, and pre-training corpora distributions. Gemini models are frequently optimized for conversational creativity, narrative flow, and stylistic variety, which naturally encourages the selection of idiomatic equivalents and figurative expressions over plain prose explanations. On the other hand, ChatGPT is often governed by stricter safety, literal fidelity, and risk-aversion optimization checkpoints in certain versions, steering the model toward cautious paraphrasing to minimize semantic hallucination or misrepresentation risks (Fu & Liu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). These architectural biases dictate why Gemini exhibits a higher propensity for idiomatic preservation compared to ChatGPT's safer, literal-leaning translation path.

Critical Evaluation of Cultural Distortion and Mistranslation

While AI systems successfully maintain high narrative coverage, severe systemic vulnerabilities persist, particularly regarding cultural distortion. When generative models encounter localized culture-bound expressions and rely on automated paraphrasing, they risk stripping away the poetic layers, emotional depth, and culture-bound aesthetic identity of the work (Bassnett, 2014; Obeidat et al., 2024). Furthermore, because commercial LLMs are predominantly trained on Eurocentric data repositories, they run the systemic risk of flattening or misrepresenting "other cultures" through biased, generalized, or culturally mismatched approximations (Jenks, 2025). For instance, when an AI model maps complex local emotional nuances into misaligned target expressions, the localized emotional cadence and socio-cultural fidelity of Indonesian literature are compromised, creating a subtle yet critical distortion of the author's original voice.

Limitations of the Methodology

To contextualize these findings properly, certain methodological boundaries must be acknowledged. This investigation analyzed a single literary work (*Hujan Bulan Juni* by Sapardi Djoko Damono) within a single language pair (Indonesian to English) utilizing specific snapshots of two mainstream commercial AI architectures. Consequently, the observed patterns cannot be universally generalized across all literary genres, diverse language pairs, or future iterative versions of generative AI software. Future research should expand the dataset across multiple literary texts, stylistic genres, and distinct source-target language pairs to validate these behavioral trends more comprehensively.

Implications for Translator Education and Practice

These empirical insights carry profound consequences for translator education and professional practice. Rather than positioning AI tools as autonomous replacements for human expertise, modern translation curricula should reframe systems like ChatGPT and Gemini as high-speed draft assistants. Human intervention remains utterly indispensable for auditing semantic accuracy, resolving subtle cultural distortions, auditing cross-linguistic nuances, and restoring the poetic rhythm inherent in quality literary translation (Pagalilauan, 2025). Translator training programs must therefore cultivate critical AI-literacy, teaching students how to identify algorithmic translation flattening, correct cultural mismatches, and harness AI efficiency responsibly without sacrificing literary integrity.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that ChatGPT and Gemini employed three translation strategies when dealing with Indonesian idiomatic terms, with translation by paraphrase emerging as the dominant strategy for achieving semantic clarity and functional equivalence. The findings further reveal distinct translation tendencies

between the two systems, as ChatGPT generally prioritizes semantic transparency and information transfer, whereas Gemini demonstrates a stronger tendency to preserve idiomatic nuances and stylistic features through the use of functionally equivalent expressions. These findings suggest that Large Language Models (LLMs) process idiomatic expressions through systematic and relatively predictable translation strategies in line with established translation frameworks rather than through random lexical substitutions.

Although these AI systems demonstrate considerable potential in facilitating cross-cultural translation, their predominant reliance on paraphrasing indicates that preserving poetic nuances, metaphorical depth, and cultural aesthetics remains challenging. Therefore, human intervention continues to play an essential role in ensuring that the artistic and cultural dimensions of literary works are adequately preserved throughout the translation process. Nevertheless, these findings are limited to twenty-three idiomatic expressions extracted from Sapardi Djoko Damono's novel *Hujan Bulan Juni* and should be interpreted within the context of the selected corpus, as they may not fully represent translation patterns across different literary genres, language pairs, or future developments in Generative AI architectures.

Suggestions

Future studies are encouraged to investigate how these distinct translation behaviors influence human reader reception and to conduct longitudinal analyses to observe how model updates affect the consistency of these strategies. Further research should also test these models on more diverse literary forms, such as poetry or traditional dramatic texts, to assess whether the identified preference for paraphrasing holds in higher-density figurative contexts. Additionally, exploring how different prompting techniques might steer these models toward more creative rather than purely literal translation outcomes would be a valuable avenue for future inquiry.

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