

RE-EVALUATING LITERARY EQUIVALENCE: THE ROLE OF PROMPT ENGINEERING IN DIGITAL LITERARY TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The rapid advancement of Large Language Models (LLMs) has resulted in a "denotative fixation" in machine-assisted translation. In this context, translations often prioritise lexical accuracy over pragmatic and aesthetic resonance. "Human-centric" models are required in the translation of Uzbek literary masterpieces, which are characterised by high morphological density and distinctive cultural concepts [8]. To address these issues, this study introduces a Linguo-Cybernetic Framework that employs the "Master-Prompting" method, a strategy for crafting targeted instructions to guide AI translation.

Keywords: Master-Prompting, Translation Transformations, Large Language Models (LLMs), Uzbek Literature, Aesthetic Recovery, Linguo-Cybernetics, AI in Translation

1. Introduction

Translation technology has shifted from mechanical dictionary matching to the self-attention mechanisms of the "Transformer" architecture [30]. These technical leaps have revolutionised technical and functional translation. However, an "aesthetic gap" remains a barrier in literary prose. Nida.E.A notes that the "poetic function" of a text, where cultural resonance is as vital as information, is often lost in translation from Uzbek to English [19]. In Uzbek literature, writers like Abdulla Qodiriy and Cho‘lpon use deep pragmatic nuances. Concepts such as *andisha* (social tact) and *hayo* (modesty) often get flattened by standard AI models. These models usually produce sterile, denotative translations. For example, a zero-shot AI might render "*Sho‘rim qursin!*" as "*Let my salt dry!*". This misses the cultural weight a human would assign to "*Woe is me!*" [7].

This research evaluates "Master-Prompting" as a methodological intervention to bridge this gap. It asserts that the translator's role is now that of a Linguistic Architect, guiding AI through complex transformations. We argue that explicitly naming and demanding specific Translation Transformations, such as *Modulation*, *Substitution*,

and *Syntactic Transposition*, in the AI's instructions enables the human translator to redirect the model's attention to the pragmatic layers of the text.

2. Literature review.

Classical translation theory holds that transformations are necessary when literal translation fails to convey the original intent. This framework draws on the work of Mona Baker and V.N. Komissarov. In *In Other Words*, Baker introduces the concept of Pragmatic Equivalence, emphasising the need to recreate the author's intentionality in translation [4]. Master-prompting establishes contextual parameters that allow artificial intelligence to simulate this intentionality [21]. In *Theory of Translation*, Komissarov categorizes Grammatical and Lexical Transformations [18], such as transposition, replacement, and modulation. Integrating these technical terms into prompts enables the large language model (LLM) to function as a "Linguistic Engine" that adheres to specific structural rules [21]. Nida and Taber's concept of Dynamic Equivalence establishes the primary objective of the Master-Prompt: to evoke in the English reader a response that closely parallels the original experience of the Uzbek reader [19].

The primary challenge in Uzbek-English AI translation lies in the typological divide between Uzbek's agglutinative nature and English's analytic structure. Drawing on the work of B. Mengliyev, who pioneered the computational formalization of linguistic units in Uzbekistan, this framework justifies the inclusion of morphological parameters within the Master-Prompt. Mengliyev's research into the hierarchical structure of Uzbek morphemes allows us to instruct the AI to perform a "pre-translation" deconstruction of complex Uzbek affixes.

The efficacy of an LLM as a "Linguistic Engine" depends on its exposure to and understanding of structural alignments. N. Abdurahmonova's extensive work in developing the Uzbek National Corpus and parallel corpora provides the empirical justification for the Master-Prompt's structural logic. By referencing Abdurahmonova's findings on statistical and rule-based modelling, we can optimise how the AI handles the transposition and replacement of grammatical structures.

Finally, to bridge the "aesthetic gap," the translation must move beyond syntax into the realm of Pragmatic Equivalence [4]. Sh. Hamroyeva's contributions to semantic tagging and lexicography are essential here. Her work allows for the grounding of "semantic transformations"-ensuring that the AI recognizes the "milliy bo'yoqdor so'zlar" (culturally colored words) and the emotional weight of literary vocabulary.

Prompt engineering serves as the foundational coding mechanism in contemporary artificial intelligence applications [22]. In literary translation, a "Simple Prompt" (e.g., "Translate this text") is insufficient because it neglects both text-level

equivalence, the alignment of message and style between source and target texts, and pragmatic equivalence, which involves maintaining the intended effect and purpose for the target audience [20]. Mona Baker defines both concepts in *In Other Words* [4]. An 'Advanced Literary Prompt' should incorporate context (such as background information about the text), persona (the desired tone or voice for the translation), and specific transformation constraints (such as stylistic or genre rules) to achieve what Baker refers to as the "coherence of the target text" [14].

Effective guidance for artificial intelligence necessitates structuring prompts as Linguo-Cybernetic instructions [33]. This approach is grounded in Komissarov's theory of "Levels of Equivalence" [15], which ensures that the AI prioritises the highest level: the communicative aim [3].

Role (Persona): Defines the AI's stylistic parameters, such as "You are an expert translator specialising in 19th-century Jadid literature" [16].

Methodology (The Transformation): The method should be explicitly identified. Komissarov contends that transformations such as modulation (altering a sentence's perspective or point of view) or compensation (recovering lost meaning elsewhere in the text) are necessary when direct semantic parallels are lacking [15].

Tone/Voice: Specify the required register, for example, maintaining the melancholic, archaic tone characteristic of Cho'lpon's era.

Constraint: Instructs the AI to avoid modernising language or content to contemporary standards or expressions. For example, "Avoid anachronistic Americanisms" directs the AI to exclude American words or phrases not present in the historical context [10].

Literal translation of Uzbek idiomatic expressions does not achieve Pragmatic Equivalence. Baker observes that translators frequently must choose between word-level accuracy and the preservation of the intended effect on the reader [4].

Source: "*Ko'ngli ochiq odam.*"

Naive AI Translation: "*A person with an open heart.*" (*A functional calque, but lacks literary resonance*).

Master-Prompt Transformation: "*Translate the following using the Adaptation Method* [19]. *Replace the Uzbek idiom with an English equivalent that reflects hospitality and sincerity in a traditional rural setting.*"

AI Result: "*A man whose heart is always warm and doors never barred.*"

Literary Uzbek is characterised by complex, multi-clause structures [5]. To preserve what Baker refers to as Linear Dislocation, or the management of information flow, the AI should be instructed to restructure the syntax [4].

Prompt Technique: "*Apply Sentence Partitioning as described in Translation Transformation theory. Break down the following complex participial sentence into*

three distinct segments to increase dramatic tension, ensuring the rhythmic flow matches English noir fiction."

3. Methodology

To initiate the comparative study, a triangulation method was employed for contrastive analysis of high-complexity fragments taken from original literary work "O'tkan kunlar" by Abdulla Qodiriy, translated works "Bygone days" by Mark Reese, I.M.Tukhtasinov, and Carol Ermakova and AI generated translations (Chat GPT, Deep AI, Gemini, Claude).

The three-stage comparison:

Stage 1: Zero-shot (Control). For this stage, AI translation (Chat GPT, DeepSeek, Gemini) was conducted without any contextual metadata or specialised instructions. The purpose was to assess the translation's fidelity to literal meaning, testing for the phenomenon known as "Denotative Fixation," in which the output remains closely bound to denotative content and lacks interpretive nuance.

Stage 2: Master-Prompting (Experimental). In this stage, the Linguo-Cybernetic Framework guided AI translation [11]. The AI was instructed to apply *Dynamic Equivalence* and to perform targeted translation transformations, such as substitutions and transpositions, with the goal of balancing semantic accuracy and stylistic resonance as evidenced in human translation processes [9].

The prompt formula applied was: *[Role: Expert Translator] + [Context: 19th-Century Uzbekistan] + [Method: Semantic Modulation] + [Target: Aesthetic Resonance]*[1].

Stage 3: Human Reference (Gold Standard). This stage utilised published reference translations by Mark Reese (2018), I.M.Tukhtasinov (2017), and Carol Ermakova (2018) as benchmarks to represent the highest available standard, emphasising professional standards in translation assessment.

4. Results and discussion.

The comparative analysis of traditional human translations (Table 1) and various Artificial Intelligence (AI) outputs (Table 2) reveals a significant disparity in the quality of literary equivalence achieved through different translation methods. While zero-shot AI translations, including ChatGPT, DeepSeek, and Gemini, demonstrate functional linguistic accuracy, they frequently fail to capture the aesthetic resonance and cultural nuances found in human translations. In contrast, the application of Master Prompting consistently bridges this "aesthetic gap", producing results that often surpass zero-shot models and closely approximate the stylistic depth of professional human translators.

Table 1.

Representation of high-complexity fragments (original source and human translations)

№	Original Source	Human translation Mark Reese	Human translation I.M.Tukhtasinov	Human translation Carol Ermakova
1.	“Bek uchun bir necha joylarga qiz aytdirmak istalangan bo‘lsa ham, - dedi, - avval taqdir bitmaganlik, undan keyin bekning uylanishka bo‘lg‘an qarshiliq-laridan bu kungacha to‘y qilolmay kelamiz.” (p 9)	"We wished to find a girl for the bek, because, first of all, he is destined for matrimony, it is the natural course of things; but previously he resisted the idea, so we could not plan a wedding for him until now." (p 48)	“Although there had been some attempts to find a suitable bride for Bek, they were not a success because of his being against the marriage and we couldn’t arrange a feast then.” (p 10)	“Although attempts were made more than once to find a suitable bride for our bek,” he said, “evidently, we were not fated to find such a one, and then my bek himself began to resist marriage. Consequently, to this day, we have not been able to arrange a wedding.” (p 14)
2.	“Yurgan daryo, o‘lturgan bo‘ryo emish,-dedi Akram hoji.” (p 16)	" 'Those who walk are a river; those who sit are a reed mat, " said Akram Hajji. (p 58)	They say “an eager beaver always gets what he wants”, - Akram Khoji said. (p 18)	“Those who travel are like a river, those who stay, like a mat.” Akram -hadji remarked. (p 21)
3.	«O‘g‘lim yosh, sen dunyoning issiq-sovug‘ini tatig‘an va manim ishongan kishimsan. O‘g‘limning har bir holidan xabar olib turish sening vazifangdir» (p 22)	"My son is young. Throughout your lifetime, you have experienced the hot and cold of the world. You are also my confidant. Your duty is to mind my sons every step" (p 67)	“My son is still young; you’ve been through fire and water, seen and known a lot. Take care of my son, your overriding objective” (p 24)	“M y son is still young. You have passed through fire and water, seen and learnt much, you are loyal to me. Care for my son - this is your highest task.” (p 25)
4.	«...sharti ketib, parti qolg‘an» bir darbozaning ostonasidan uch-to‘rt qadam ichkariga kirilsa Buxoro zindonlaridan birini his etilur va qorong‘u yo‘lakning nihoyatidagi yorug‘liqqa tomon oshiqilur.” (p 27)	“...if we tried to classify this long-suffering gate, we might put it in the "ancient as history itself" category. After three or four steps through the opening, we are immediately beset with the terrors of Bukhara’s dungeons, only finding relief from the light filtering in at the end of a dark corridor -and the hope of an exit.” (p 75)	“... just worn out, like history itself, the long-suffering gate and making three or four steps over the threshold, you find yourself like in one of Bukhoro zindons, and naturally striving towards the light at the end of the corridor.” (p 28)	“...the unpretentious, long-suffering, time-blackened gates which creak and squeak as you open them, dilapidated and time-worn as history itself, and taking two or three steps beyond the threshold, you will find yourself in what for all the world appears to be a Bukhara zindan, and your feet will automatically carry you towards the light flooding in at the end of the ginnel.”(p 31)
5.	“Koshki edi tegalsam, - dedi To‘ybeka, - men uning bir tukiga ham arzimayman. Ammo sen bo‘lsang uning	“I wish I could marry. I am not worth even one of his hairs. But you would equal him. Equal with equal, type with type, dung in its very own bag! Ha ha ha!"	“I’d love to, but I can’t. I’m not worthy of even one string of his hair! But you would be an excellent match for him. No wonder people say: “A young	“If only such happiness were my lot! But I ‘m not worth a hair on his head! But you, well now, you are a good match for him. Not without reason they say:

	bilan tenglashar eding. «Teng-tengi bilan, tezak qopi bilan». Xa-xa-xa!.. (p 32)	(p 82)	couple matches the same age", ha ha ha!" (p 34)	'Each to their own, but dung belongs in a sack!" And she guffawed. (p 35)
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Table 2.

Representation of high-complexity fragments (Zero shot-AI results: Chat GPT, DeepSeek, Gemini and master prompting)

№	Original Source	Chat GPT	DeepSeek	Gemini	Master Prompting
1.	"Bek uchun bir necha joylarga qiz aytdirmak istalangan bo'lsa ham, - dedi, - avval taqdir bitmaganlik, undan keyin bekning uylanishka bo'lg'an qarshiliq-laridan bu kungacha to'y qilolmay kelimiz."	"Although there had been intentions to propose several girls for the Bek, - he said, - first because fate had not decreed it, and then due to the Bek's own reluctance to marry, we have not been able to hold a wedding until today."	"Even though attempts were made to propose girls to the bek from several places," he said, "first it was not destined by fate, and then due to the bek's reluctance to marry, we have not been able to hold the wedding until this day."	"Even though it was wanted to have some places say for the bek," he said, "we have not been able to have a wedding until today, first because of the <i>lack of fate</i> , and then because of the bek's opposition to marriage."	"Though they had sought to secure a bride for the bek from several quarters," he said, "first, because destiny had not yet inscribed that union, and then, owing to the bek's own resistance to marriage - for these reasons, we have been unable to celebrate the wedding to this very day."
2.	"Yurgan daryo, o'lturgan bo'ryo emish,-dedi Akram hoji."	"They say: a walking river, a sitting wolf, -said Akram hoji."	"A walking river, a sitting mat it is," said Akram hoji."	"A walking river, a sitting wolf it is," said Akram Haji."	"He who wanders is a river; he who sits is but a reed mat," as Akram Hoji would say.
3.	«O'g'lim yosh, sen dunyoning issiq-sovug'ini tatig'an va manim ishongan kishimsan. O'g'limning har bir holidan xabar olib turish sening vazifangdir»,	"My son is young; you have tasted the world's heat and cold and are a person I trust. It is your duty to keep informed of my son's every condition."	"My son is young; you are a person who has tasted the hot and cold of the world and whom I trust. It is your duty to keep yourself informed of every situation of my son."	"My son is young; you have tasted the heat and cold of the world and are a person I trust. It is your duty to keep informed of my son's every condition."	"My son is young, and you are one who has tasted both the warmth and the chill of this world - a man in whom I have placed my trust. To keep yourself informed of your son's every condition, every turn of his fate - that is your charge."
4.	«...sharti ketib, parti qolg'an» bir darbozaning ostonasidan uch-to'rt qadam ichkariga kirilsa Buxoro zindonlaridan birini his etilur va qorong'u yo'lakning nihoyatidagi	"...if one steps three or four paces inside the threshold of a gate whose condition has gone and only its form remains, one feels as though in one of Bukhara's dungeons, and	"...the threshold having lost its condition and remained a party," if one steps three to four paces inside the gateway, one would feel one of the dungeons of Bukhara, and one hurries toward the light at the	"...stepping three or four paces inside the threshold of a gate whose 'condition has departed and only its frame remains,' one feels as if in one of the dungeons of Bukhara and hastens toward the light at the end of the dark corridor."	"...its former glory lost, its shape left hollow." No sooner had one stepped three or four paces inside the threshold of such a gateway than one felt the presence of one of Bukhara's dungeons, and one hurried toward the light that

	yorug'liqqa tomon oshiqilur."	hastens toward the light at the end of the dark corridor."	end of the dark corridor.		waited at the end of the dark passageway.
5.	"Koshki edi tegalsam, - dedi To'ybeka, - men uning bir tukiga ham arzimayman. Ammo sen bo'lsang uning bilan tenglashar eding. «Teng-tengi bilan, tezak qopi bilan». Xa-xa-xa!..	"If only I could be worthy of him," said To'ybeka, "I am not worth even a single hair of his. But you-you would have been his equal. 'Equal with equal, and the dung sack with its kind.' Ha-ha-ha!.."	"If only I could reach him," said Toybeka, "I am not worth even one hair of his. But you, you would be equal to him. 'Equal with equal, dung with its sack.' Ha-ha-ha!.."	"If only I could marry him," said Toybeka, "I am not worth even a single hair of his. But you, you would be a match for him. 'Equal with equal, a dung-sack with its own.' Ha-ha-ha!.."	"If only I could wed him," said Toybeka. "I am not worth a single strand of his hair. But you-you would be his equal. 'Peer with peer, and dung-sack with gear.' Ha-ha-ha!.."

Zero-shot translations typically provide a literal, "unmodulated" rendering that often misses the idiomatic or metaphorical weight of the original Uzbek text.

Semantic Errors and "Hallucinations": In the second fragment involving the proverb "*Yurgan daryo, o'lturgan bo'ryo emish*," both ChatGPT and Gemini mistranslated the word *bo'ryo* (reed mat) as "wolf". This error fundamentally alters the proverb's meaning, losing the contrast between the dynamic river and the static mat found in the human translations by Mark Reese and Carol Ermakova.

Loss of Cultural Idiom: For the phrase "*sharti ketib, parti qolg'an*," DeepSeek provided a disjointed literal translation: "*the threshold having lost its condition and remained a party*". This fails to communicate the idiom's meaning of extreme dilapidation, which human translators rendered more effectively as "dilapidated and time-worn" or "ancient as history itself".

The Efficacy of Master Prompting: Master prompting acts as a mechanical necessity to inject historical context, stylistic constraints, and cultural depth into the AI's processing. The results in Table 2 demonstrate that this method significantly outperforms zero-shot attempts by aligning the output with the "human" quality of Table 1.

In fragment 5, the proverb "*Teng-tengi bilan, tezak qopi bilan*" is rendered by Gemini (zero-shot) as a dry statement: "*Equal with equal, a dung-sack with its own*". Master prompting, however, recognizes the need for rhythmic balance and aesthetic flavor, rendering it as: "*Peer with peer, and dung-sack with gear*."

This approach mimics the slant rhyme and mnemonic quality found in professional literary translations, such as Carol Ermakova's "*Each to their own, but dung belongs in a sack!*".

Regarding the phrase "*dunyoning issiq-sovug'ini tatig'an*," zero-shot models like ChatGPT and Gemini translated it literally as having tasted "heat and cold". While accurate, it lacks the evocative weight of the human versions by I.M. Tukhtasinov and Carol Ermakova, who used the English equivalent "*passed through fire and water*".

Master prompting successfully bridged this gap by elevating the register: “*One who has tasted both the warmth and the chill of this world...*”

In fragment 4, describing the Bukhara gate, the master prompt output moves beyond simple description to create an atmospheric narrative: “*its former glory lost, its shape left hollow*”. This mirrors the descriptive richness provided by Mark Reese, who described the gate as “long-suffering” and “ancient”.

The data suggests that while zero-shot AI can manage basic communication, it lacks the “literary soul” required for translating high-complexity fragments. Master prompting functions as a digital bridge; by providing the AI with the specific “linguistic parameters” of the 19th-century Uzbek context, it allows the model to shift from literal decoding to aesthetic reconstruction. Consequently, the master-prompted AI outputs exhibit a level of literary equivalence that is remarkably close to the human translations in Table 1, proving that prompt engineering is a vital tool in achieving digital literary fidelity.

Table 3.

Summary of Success Hierarchy

№	Fragment	Best Performer	Master Prompting Rank	Zero-Shot Best	Notes
1.	Fate	Carol Ermakova / Master Prompting	1st (tied)	ChatGPT (2nd)	Gemini fails
2.	Proverb	ChatGPT / Gemini	3rd	ChatGPT (1st)	Humans all erred
3.	Trust	Master Prompting	1st	ChatGPT (2nd)	Unique preservation of <i>tatig'an</i>
4.	Dungeon	Master Prompting	1st	ChatGPT (2nd)	Only interpretive resolution of corruption
5.	Laughter	Mark Reese / Master Prompting	1st (tied)	DeepSeek (2nd)	All adequate

Master prompting significantly outperforms zero-shot AI (ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Gemini) across most metrics of literary translation quality, achieving proximity to expert human translators (particularly Carol Ermakova) in handling cultural metaphors, period register, atmospheric description, and proverbial material. The exception, Fragment 2, highlights both the promise and peril of AI translation: zero-shot models can sometimes correct human errors, but master prompting’s methodological conservatism prioritizes literary tradition over raw lexical accuracy.

For the purposes of digital literary translation, prompt engineering emerges not as a supplementary tool but as a *constitutive methodology*, one that allows humanistic values to shape AI output at the level of poetics, not merely semantics. The five fragments analyzed here provide empirical support for re-evaluating literary equivalence as a prompt-mediated, context-sensitive, and aesthetically negotiated achievement rather than a stable or automatic property of machine translation systems.

5. Conclusion.

The future of literary translation relies on combining linguistic theory with prompt engineering. This study shows that translators are becoming Linguistic Architects, mainly responsible for creating prompts that guide AI in creative work. For translators worldwide, this change marks a shift: machines are moving from being mere tools to becoming collaborative apprentices, helping keep the "soul" of Uzbek literature alive in the digital age.

Our main aim to create "Linguo-Cybernetic" prompts that set the tone, express cultural meaning, and outline how to transform the text. This functions as a tool for "Aesthetic Recovery" when directed by human creative intuition, rather than serving solely as a digital dictionary. For translators and educators around the world, this change means that machines now support, rather than replace, people's ability to work across cultural and artistic boundaries.

Today's classrooms should focus on building AI-Assisted Translation skills. Students should practice analysing and rewriting prompts to decide which of Komissarov's transformations are needed to turn a basic AI translation into a polished literary version. Moreover, prompt engineering should be taught at a subject level to the Translation Theory faculty students in higher education.

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