



BICULTURAL MEDIATION AND INDIRECTNESS IN AI-ASSISTED LOCALISATION: A TASK-BASED CASE STUDY ON CULTURE-BOUNDNESS, PHRASEOLOGY, AND INTERTEXT

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This paper argues that in AI-assisted localisation workflows, *indirectness* may be intensified even when translation appears to proceed directly (e.g. English → Polish without an explicit pivot text). Indirectness is reconceptualised not only as classic relay translation but as a form of implicit mediation shaped by normative filtering, platform constraints, and model-driven tendencies towards probabilistic typicality.

Under such conditions, culturally dense source texts risk being smoothed, standardised, or reframed. Localisation thus becomes an implicitly mediated practice, foregrounding the translator's role as a bicultural mediator rather than merely a bilingual language converter.

The empirical anchor is a task-based case study conducted with MA students of English Studies specialising in translation. The source text is Claire Messud's essay "*Dear president-elect: Can a leopard change his spots?*" [CBC, 12 Nov 2016], treated as a deliberately culture-loaded artefact rich in political referents, evaluative stance, idiomatic allusion, and intertextual cues.

The study addresses four questions:

1. How can indirect translation be reconceptualised for AI-assisted localisation as a form of implicit mediation?
2. Which culture-specific items, phraseological units, and intertextual signals are most vulnerable to flattening in AI-assisted drafts?
3. How do student translations differ from AI-generated outputs in terms of gain/loss trade-offs between readability and cultural density?
4. What implications follow for translator education and bicultural competence development in AI-enabled workflows?

The argument integrates three perspectives.

First, a narrative-pragmatic approach [Baker] conceptualises translation as renarration, foregrounding stance, evaluative positioning, and discourse framing.

Second, a norm-oriented descriptive framework [Toury] explains how localisation operates within target-culture expectations. AI outputs often converge toward statistically typical forms, aligning with target norms and producing what may be described as smoothing or centralisation.

Third, an operational analytic toolkit is employed to avoid general claims about "loss of culture."

- Aixelá's CSI typology enables systematic analysis of strategies from conservation to substitution [Aixelá].
- Szerszunowicz's work supports analysis of culture-bound phraseology [Szerszunowicz].



- Hatim and Mason's translator-as-communicator model informs treatment of implicature and rhetorical structure [Hatim & Mason].

The reconceptualisation of indirectness draws on Pięta's expansion of relay/mediated terminology [Pięta] and situates AI-assisted localisation within broader scholarship on indirect translation.

The study is qualitative and contrastive.

Selected excerpts from Messud's essay are identified based on cultural density:

- concentration of CSIs,
- phraseological salience,
- intertextual triggers (e.g. the biblical allusion in "Can a leopard change his spots?").

Two translation streams are compared:

1. Human stream: MA student translations produced under pedagogical constraints emphasising audience, function, and register.
2. LLM stream: AI-generated drafts produced under controlled prompting regimes (baseline vs iterative localisation prompts).

Analysis proceeds in two steps: (1) descriptive coding of CSIs, phraseology, and intertext recognition; (2) interpretive synthesis examining narrative reframing, norm convergence, and localisation trade-offs.

The comparison tests whether prompt engineering can reliably preserve intertextual and phraseological force.

The paper anticipates several implications.

First, the most consequential differences between human and AI outputs are likely to occur at the level of cultural presupposition, evaluative stance, and intertext recognition rather than propositional meaning.

Second, AI outputs may exhibit recurrent smoothing and centralisation effects – enhancing accessibility while attenuating rhetorical edge.

Third, prompt engineering may improve register alignment but does not guarantee stable recovery of idiomatic or intertextual depth.

Fourth, AI-assisted localisation can be theorised as a novel profile of indirect translation in which mediation arises not from a human pivot text but from model priors, training data regularities, and platform norms.

The paper thus bridges classic indirect translation scholarship with contemporary AI-mediated translation practice and argues for renewed emphasis on bicultural mediation in translator education.

The findings reveal systematic differences between the two streams. While AI outputs consistently preserve propositional meaning and exhibit high fluency, they tend toward smoothing, over-explicitation, and convergence on statistically typical phraseology. Intertextual cues and evaluative stance prove particularly vulnerable to neutralisation or paraphrastic reformulation. By contrast, the human translations demonstrate stronger bicultural mediation: explicit recognition of allusion, more strategic negotiation between retention and adaptation, and greater sensitivity to rhetorical markedness and socio-political nuance.



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