

Limits of Translating Idiolects with AI: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT: Translation Studies are increasingly dealing with the importance of focusing on cultural aspects during the translation process (Bassnett, Lefevre, 1990). From a cultural perspective, it is therefore interesting to analyse the divergent approaches of translators in translating diverse expressive ways in literature (diatopic, distractic, diaphasic and diamesic variations) (Lefevre, 2017), and moreover it is relevant to recall the concept of intercultural competence (Katan, 2009). Being culturally sensitive and careful is a paramount for a translator. The concept of intercultural competence in translation involves a wide range of dimensions such as awareness, flexibility, empathy, respect, curiosity (Deardorff, 2006). It is not enough to have a rough and plain knowledge of culture, but the translator needs to act emotionally, accurately and authentically when approaching a “different perspective” of the world. Their “cultural awareness” is vital and a priority in preserving the intercultural dimension of a translation. The objective of this study is to shed light into the concept of intercultural competence in the field of translation, highlighting some of the challenges and main issues involving the use of AI. Qualitative research will be conducted to: a) analyse the role of the intercultural competences in the activity of the translator in order to understand if recurring to AI does not prejudice cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, or emotional dimensions; b) provide a proposal for a new translation with AI tools to highlight possible issues in detecting the cultural dimension of a literary work, generating misunderstandings or misinterpretations; c) elaborate a translation approach which considers the cultural aspects of characters with a different social and cultural background. This study will focus on four chapters of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (chapter 5, 6, 9 and 10), in order to explore the ways in which the characters of Mr Quincey P. Morris, Mr Swales and Dr Abraham Van Helsing express themselves in the English original version of the work, considering micro and macro linguistic elements. Afterwards, the investigation will be moved towards the translating process and the translations into Italian of the same chapters will be inspected, to examine if the translator and the AI software (Google Translator) were able to convey the cultural variations of the three characters above mentioned. In this regard, considerations about the advantages or disadvantages of AI will be discussed. Nevertheless, more empirical research is necessary to generalize this study’s findings and to map out both challenges and advantages in the activity of a translator, especially related to the intercultural dimension.

KEYWORDS: idiolects, translation, AI, intercultural competence, cultural turn

I. INTERCULTURAL APPROACH AND AI

Language is the main channel we utilize to communicate our culture, as well as culture could not be transmitted and spread without language. Both communicative and cultural elements have a fundamental role during our interactions, in learning or speaking a language, and in the translation process. Therefore, the communicative, cultural, communal and social functions of a language are relevant and need a specific consideration. The more people are “culturally competent”, the easier it will be for them to reduce the cultural gap and favour understanding and sharing of linguistic and cultural elements. In fact, the development of an intercultural competence is a process of dynamic and continuous learning implying a transformation of our identity during the interaction with different cultures. This process involves translation because it implies the communication of a meaning that is necessarily cultural, as well. Besides the basic components of intercultural competence, a successful intercultural person is expected to be flexible, motivated, tolerant and adaptable, to use appropriate linguistic means and communication styles, to listen, observe and adjust to different situations and behaviours. Motivation, especially, is considered as “the set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication” (Deardorff, 2006:36).

Malinowski was a pioneer in terms of cultural approaches to the translation process, focusing on the idea that the dimension of the grammar should be linked both “with the context of situation and with the context of culture” (1935: 73). According to Bassnett (1993), translation is not only a kind of pure linguistic activity but also a kind of intercultural and intra-cultural communication, an activity that connects two cultural contexts. The scholar proposes to consider cultural aspects for the study of translation, especially for the equivalence of the source text and the target text. In her opinion, translation is “a primary method of imposing a

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meaning while hiding the power relations that lie behind the production of that meaning”, (p. 36). Nida (1964) considers words as deeply linked to their contexts, claiming also that a translator needs to stress these differences to create a meaningful translation. According to the Cultural Studies the focus, in translation, shifts from the original text to the target text. This typical cultural turn defines the act of translating as an act of communication that occurs between cultures. In view of the new horizons of translation studies, research has progressively shifted towards the source text and culture on the one hand and its linguistic and cultural realization on the other. The latest theoretical orientations conceive translation as a socially and culturally situated activity and closely connected to the context in which it occurs. This means that the cultural dimension assumes greater importance than in the past, becoming a fundamental dimension of translation sciences, and that translations become essentially cultural facts and specific to the culture for which they are intended. This is the cultural turn mentioned above: translation is no longer conceived exclusively as linguistic transcoding but as a process that also implies an important operation of cultural transfer (Toury, 2012). According to this cultural paradigm, therefore, the central issue is to study the mutual influence of cultural and contextual aspects. Translation is therefore a process that brings us closer to different cultures, or a bridge between different cultures, and to bring distant cultural worlds closer together, textual transformations are needed (Osimo, 2006). A text is therefore always produced in a specific cultural context and is formulated according to explicit and implicit expectations. Translating is no longer considered a mechanical process, a mere passage from one language to another, but as a creative process that is not accessible to everyone. Extralinguistic factors, which are given greater importance during the production process, allow for a much broader vision in which the translator constitutes the connecting link that determines the interaction of different cultures (Lefevere, 2017).

Translation, therefore, becomes a practice of negotiation within the cultural order of discourse. This is why it is considered as a testing ground for the encounter and comparison among different cultures and presupposes great mediation skills by the translator. The translator is therefore not a simple linguistic expert but rather a true 'bicultural mediator', or cultural mediator tout court, capable of putting two people or two communities with different cultural expectations and dimensions in contact with each other. The concepts of translation and interpretation are then associated with the widely used term mediation, which reflects social transformations due to the phenomenon of globalization and new studies in this field. Mediating essentially means reconciling, relating, composing a contrast by negotiating between the parties involved and, in the specific case of translation studies, it implies both linguistic and cultural aspects of the translation process. The point of view of translators has long since shifted to that of mediators of culture and intercultural communicative functions, to account for the different range of values, beliefs and social representations in their respective cultural groups. This new approach to translation is described as an orientation to cultural transfer rather than linguistic transfer; a view of translation as an act of communication rather than a process of simple transcoding; an orientation toward the function of the target text and the text as an integral part of the world and not as an isolated specimen of language, (Bassnett, Lefevere, 1990). The translator needs cultural knowledge and awareness to apply successful translation strategies when producing an intercultural communication tool that functions optimally in the target culture (Venuti, 2002). Translators play a fundamental role in cultural work, as their profession bridges different cultures through the translation of literary texts, essays, documents, and other materials. This profession requires in-depth knowledge of the relevant languages and cultures.

The translator's job is literally changing with the advent of artificial intelligence. Translation was, as a matter of fact, one of the first areas to apply artificial intelligence, initially with very tentative results and then, over time, increasingly sophisticated and reliable. However, many questions have arisen, including moral and environmental concerns. While machine translation (MT) has made significant progress in speed and overall sentence rendering thanks to AI, phenomena such as polysemy, ambiguity, figurative language, coherence, and cohesion remain problematic. Especially in literary translation, machine translation cannot be equated with human translation, because it involves a creative act. AI, instead, generates the translation by combining contextual elements, probabilistic calculations, and correspondences of various types. Everything but creativity. In light of these considerations, there is an irreducible part of translation work — the one which requires research, sensitivity, effective communication skills, and cultural adaptation — that must always be controlled by the human mind to address the untranslatable and interpret implicit or culturally foreign meaning. This mediation process becomes extremely complex as translators are required to go beyond the surface of meanings and convey messages embedded in specific worldviews by considering particular cultural dimensions that recall equally different perspectives (Agorni, 2018). The central role of human skills and how they integrate into new professional practices must be carefully considered (Mattiota, Molino, Cinato, 2023). Moreover, key dimensions such as awareness, training and adaptability are strategies to be implemented to face risks and exploit the opportunities represented by the use of new technologies. Software cannot handle the nuances of human speech, including words with various meanings and sentences with multiple grammatical structures. Another important factor to consider is linguistic localization. Translation must take into account regional differences, dialects, and linguistic variants that may exist within a language. They lack the tools to process the context in which a language is used. This is because emotions, nonverbal communication, and culture all impact language but cannot be simply reproduced by a machine based on statistics or algorithms. Each language carries with it the culture of a community, with its specific ways of thinking and expressing itself, making perfect translation equivalence, a utopian goal. In light of this, specific attention must be given to the link between translation and cross-

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cultural adaptation, with the aim of achieving culturally and contextually accurate results in the translation process itself (Benlidayi, Gupta, 2024), drawing attention to the role of the translator as a creative and active participant in communication (Bastin, 1998).

II. ANALYSIS: CHARACTERS AND THEIR IDIOLECTS

The purpose of this part of the article is to analyse three idiolects a reader can encounter while reading *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and the way in which they are translated into Italian. Particular attention will be given to three quite interesting characters: Quincey P. Morris, Mr Swales and Abraham Van Helsing.

Talking about idiolects, we assume that “no two persons speak in exactly the same way and that each person’s dialect is constantly undergoing change”, (Ivić, Crystal, 2024). For this reason, if two individuals speak and communicate differently, it is fundamental to wonder how and if it is possible - as translators - to convey the same vibes, delivering the readers with the original intentions of the very author. In the analysis, this study will concentrate on some passages: there will always be the original text (Stoker, 2011), then the translation of Google Translator and finally the version of Duscovich, which was realised taking into consideration socio-cultural aspects.

The first character we are going to consider is Mr Swales, a seemingly minor figure who nonetheless plays a significant role in the story. This shrewd, elderly man assumes the role of a kind of oracle (Stoker, 2011: 73). Mina and Lucy meet him during their stay in Whitby, Yorkshire. As the two young women take daily walks to the cemetery for fresh air, they regularly encounter Mr Swales, who is an old sailor treating them kindly and expressing both empathy and sympathy. Though he often jokes about the pointlessness of cemeteries and expresses discomfort with the “evil” of modern times, he remains deeply superstitious and firmly rooted in local folklore and tradition. His mysterious death coincides with the arrival of the ship *Demeter*, which carries Dracula to England.

Mr. Swales’ language is notably peculiar. Although the scene is set in Yorkshire, he speaks in an idiolect that closely resembles Scottish in both vocabulary and morphology. His speech is marked by features typical of oral language, including contractions such as *think o’them* (p. 74), and abbreviations like *printin’* and *holdin’* (Stoker, 2011: 74). Some expressions are also regionally distinctive—for instance, *masel’* (p. 72), *Yabblins* (p. 74), and *I must gang ageeanwards home now, miss* (p. 73).

The key issue in this study is how such linguistic features can or cannot be translated into another language while preserving the richness and distinctiveness of the character in the target culture. This variety of language is deeply rooted in a specific social, political, and cultural context, making the translator’s task particularly challenging. Idiolects present an additional difficulty, as the uniqueness of a character’s voice arises from its individual, often untranslatable, linguistic traits.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>I wouldn't fash masel' about them, miss. Them things be al wore out. Mind, I don't say that they never was, but I do say that they wasn't in my time. They be all very well for comers and trippers an' the like, but not for a nice young lady like you. Them feet-folks' from York and Leeds that be always eatin' cured herrin's an' drinkin' tea an' lookin' out to buy cheap jet would creed aught.' I wonder masel' who'd be bothered tellin' lies to them - even the newspapers, which is full of fool-talk.'</i> (p. 72)	Non mi preoccuperei troppo per loro, signorina. Sono tutte cose logore. Bada, non dico che non lo siano mai state, ma dico che non lo erano ai miei tempi. Vanno benissimo per i visitatori e i viaggiatori e simili, ma non per una brava signorina come te. Quei vagabondi di York e Leeds che mangiano sempre aringhe marinate, bevono tè e cercano di comprare kebab a buon mercato non ci crederebbero. Mi chiedo chi si prenderebbe la briga di dire loro bugie, persino ai giornali, che sono pieni di chiacchiere da idioti.	“Senta signorina, io non farei tante storie. Tutta roba andata. Occhio, non dico che ste cose non sono mai successe, dico solo che non è roba dei miei tempi. Robaccia buona solo per turisti e girovaghi, cose così, ma non per una giovane bellina come voi. Quelli che vengono a piedi da York e da Leeds, che si scofano sempre aringhe affumicate e bevono tè e cercano di comprare il nostro giaietto per quattro soldi. Quelli credono proprio a tutto. Mi domando chi ha mai voglia di raccontargli ‘ste frottole, ma neanche i giornali, che per altro sono pieni di balle.” (p. 92)

Mr. Swales is a simple yet clever man and, for this reason, his speech is minimal and certainly not refined or sophisticated. As you can deduct from the abovementioned passage, he frequently uses abbreviations and informal expressions, and his syntax is quite straightforward.

Duscovich successfully conveyed these features into Italian. No use of a regional dialect is to be seen. Standard Italian was used and the translator primarily relied on vocabulary choices. On the other hand, Google Translate works somehow as a “leveller” which makes Mr Swales quite aseptic and sterile.

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In the AI version Mr Swales uses the second personal singular *tu* to address the young lady, while Duscovich - considering the atmosphere and the requirements of the etiquette of the 19th century - decides to use the second person plural. In English there is not such a problem because the personal pronoun is in both cases *you*, but it is unimaginable that a common fisherman could address informally to a young lady. In this sense, the AI version fails to convey the original message.

The word *roba*, a colloquial Italian term for “stuff,” appears in Duscovich’s translation, whereas the AI uses a simple *cose* (It. for *things*). Another interesting case is the translation of the phrase *nice young lady*. AI renders it as *brava signorina*. This is a case of overtranslation and in fact it feels somewhat inaccurate and strays from the tone of the original. Duscovich’s choice, *una giovane bellina*, is more loyal to the original text, is more fluid and better conveys the warmth and kindness Mr. Swales shows toward Mina.

Particularly interesting is also the translation of *to buy cheap jet*. Surprisingly, AI translates it as *di comprare kebab a buon mercato*, which is completely wrong. *Jet* has nothing to do with meat or kebab, but is a black stone translated in Italian with the word *gaietto*. AI’s translation *a buon mercato* is correct, but more standard than *a quattro soldi*.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>I must gang ageeanwards home now, miss. My grand-daughter doesn't like to be kept waitin' when the tea is ready, for it takes me time to crammle aboon the grees, for there be a many of 'em; an', miss, I lack belly-timber' sairly by the clock.' (p. 73)</i>	Ora devo tornare a casa, signorina. A mia nipote non piace aspettare che il tè sia pronto, perché mi ci vuole tempo per sbrigarmi a preparare i dolci, che sono tanti; e poi, signorina, mi manca parecchio la pancia.	“Adesso devo filare a casa, signorina. A mia nipote non gli piace aspettare quando il tè è pronto, perché mi ci vuole tempo per zoppicare giù per gli scalini, perché sono tanti, e poi, signorina, a quest’ora la mia pancia brontola. (p. 92)”

Going on with the analysis, it is interesting to note how the AI translation completely modifies the message of the source text. The first misunderstood element is *be kept waitin' when the tea is ready*, which in the AI translation is translated as if it were written “be kept waiting till the tea is ready”. The second off-moment is *for it takes me time to crammle aboon the gress*: in the AI translation something is said about sweets or deserts (*dolci*), which also contextually has nothing to do. Probably the AI software tried a connection between tea and deserts. And finally *mi manca parecchio la pancia* (Italian for “I miss my belly”) has a completely different meaning than *mi brontola la pancia* by Duscovich.

Probably, the translation is badly done also because of the regional accent Mr Swales speaks. It is true that Google Translate has introduced the Scots Gaelic accent, which is not as refined as British English. As you can see, this is a clear example that the human-factor is fundamental to render socio-cultural elements.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'Yabblins!' There may be a poorish few not wrong, savin' where they make out the people too good; for there be folk that do think a balm-bowl be like the sea, if only it be their own. The whole thing be only lies. Now look you here; you come here a stranger, an' you see this kirk-garth, (p. 74)</i>	"Yabblins!" Forse ce ne sono alcuni piuttosto poveri che non hanno torto, salvo quando descrivono la gente come troppo buona; perché c'è gente che pensa che una ciotola di balsamo sia come il mare, se solo fosse la loro. Tutta la faccenda è solo menzogna. Ora guardate qui; venite qui da stranieri e vedete questa chiesa.	“Può darsi! Forse c’è un paio che non sono false, a parte nei punti che lodano troppo le persone; perché c’è gente che scambia un vaso da notte per il mare, basta che sia il suo. Tutte quante balle. Guardate qua; voi siete forestiere e vedete questo cimitero...” (p. 94)

As previously mentioned, Mr Swales frequently uses words of Scottish origin when he speaks, and the passage in question offers a striking example. If you look up the word *yabblins* in the *Dictionaries of the Scots Language* (1976), you’ll find it defined as “To talk in a voluble or excited way, to chatter, gossip.” In some translations, for example in those by Saba Sardi (2016) and Bernascone (2004) this term was translated as *stupidaggini* and *chiacchiere*, respectively—near-synonyms in Italian that both suggest “silly talk” or “nonsense.” Duscovich took a different approach, following the philological edition of *Dracula* published by Penguin Books Ltd., where a note suggests that *yabblins* might simply mean “possibly.” Given the context and tone of the character’s speech, this interpretation was deemed more appropriate. Unfortunately, AI was not able to render this stream of thoughts or deep research and the word *Yabblins* was put in the Italian translation as it was in the original text.

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The AI translation is more “loyal” to the source text talking about the *balm-bowl*. Duscovich had decided to translate it as *vaso da notte* (Italian *chamber pot*), which - even if not exactly the same thing - is more appropriate if used in relation with the sea. On the other hand, AI puts just the Italian translation of *balm-bowl*.

One last remark is about gender. In English there is no declination or difference in adjectives if they are referred to male or female individuals. Without greater context, apparently, AI is not able to realise if adjectives have to be put in the masculine or feminine version. *Stranger* of the original text referred to both young ladies and so had to be translated with *forestiere* (or *straniere*). AI translates it as *stranieri*, which is the plural masculine form.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>There's the clock, an' I must gang. My service to ye, ladies!</i> (p. 76)	Ecco l'orologio, e devo andare. Il mio servizio è per voi, signore!	Si è fatta l'ora, devo andare. I miei omaggi, signorine!” (p. 97)

This is an example where AI was not able to convey the message of the source text. *There's the clock* is like saying “the time has come”, whereas AI decided to render it as *ecco l'orologio*, which means something like “here is the watch”. The part *My service to ye* is quite understandable in the Italian version by AI, which missed completely the point.

None of the versions retained the title *ladies* in its original form. This is understandable, as it would be unlikely for an old, crafty sailor to use such a formal title when speaking Italian. More plausibly, he would refer to Mina and Lucy simply as *signore*. Duscovich chose to highlight the old man's affectionate and empathetic attitude toward the two young women by using the more endearing form *signorine*.

The second character examined in this analysis is Quincey P. Morris, a wealthy young Texan and one of Lucy Westenra's three suitors. Alongside Count Dracula, he is one of the few main characters who does not keep a diary. He is also frequently associated with his signature Bowie knife, which he carries throughout the novel. Interestingly, in Chapter 25, Morris provides a succinct self-portrait: “*I'm only a rough fellow, who hasn't, perhaps, lived as a man should to win such a distinction, but I swear to you by all that I hold sacred and dear that, should the time ever come, I shall not flinch from the duty that you have set us. And I promise you, too, that I shall make all certain, for if I am only doubtful I shall take it that the time has come!*” (Stoker, 2011: 352). Morris ultimately plays a crucial role in the novel's climax, as he and Jonathan Harker are the ones who destroy Count Dracula.

The cowboy archetype, particularly the hyper-masculine Texan, was quite popular in the Victorian era. Stoker, with his background in the theatre, knew exactly how to construct such a character for dramatic and cultural effect. His personal connections with several Americans during his travels in the United States likely influenced Morris's use of authentic American slang, which Stoker would have encountered firsthand. While this character may now seem somewhat out of place to modern readers, the stereotype served a clear purpose in the novel: to reinforce existing British perceptions of Americans while also injecting a degree of comic relief, especially in the context of the “ideal man/lover” dynamic.

Notably, Morris uses American slang more freely when he feels relaxed and is not in the presence of English gentlemen, who might find his expressions crude or inappropriate. From a contemporary perspective, his manner of speaking would likely seem humorous or exaggerated to American English speakers. American slang, as a rule, is an informal, predominantly oral register of language that evolves continuously, simplifying standard English through abbreviation, contraction, and colloquial expressions.

Morris's speech reflects this tendency toward simplification. He often speaks quickly, merging words and favoring informal forms. A clear example is his use of *ain't* – a contraction that originally derived from *aren't*, but later came to replace both *isn't* and *haven't* in colloquial usage. For instance, he tells Lucy: “*Miss Lucy, I know I ain't good enough to regulate the fixin's of your little shoes [...]*” (Stoker, 2011: 66). This linguistic trait underscores Morris's rough charm and distinctly American identity, contributing to both the diversity of voices within the novel and its broader cultural commentary.

When it comes to translating slang, one of the best examples can be found in the two distinct strategies used by Duscovich in his translation work. The first approach involves adapting the slang to more commonly spoken language in the target culture. This method prioritizes readability and accessibility for the reader, though it may come at the cost of losing some of the original characterisation.

The second strategy seeks to preserve the meaning and cultural flavor of the original slang by conveying its expressive function in the target language. In this case, the translator retains the distinctive tone or nuance of the slang, while adapting it to suit the linguistic and cultural norms of the translated text.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'Miss Lucy, I know I ain't good</i>	'Signorina Lucy, so che non sono	“Signorina Lucy, so di non meritare

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<i>enough to regulate the fixin's of your little shoes, but I guess if you wait till you find a man that is you will go join them seven young women with the lamps when you quit. Won't you just hitch up alongside of me and let us go down the long road together, driving in double harness?"</i> (p. 66)	abbastanza brava per sistemare le tue scarpette, ma immagino che se aspetti di trovare un uomo che lo sia, andrai a raggiungere quelle sette giovani donne con le lampade quando te ne andrai. Non vuoi semplicemente unirti a me e lasciarci percorrere insieme la lunga strada, guidando con la doppia imbracatura?"	neanche di allacciarvi le fibbie delle scarpine, ma credo che, se aspettate di trovare l'uomo che fa per voi, finirete come quelle sette che reggevano il lanternino. Allora vi va di attaccarvi in pariglia con me e percorrere insieme, fianco a fianco, la strada della vita, su un bel tiro a due?" (p. 84)
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Aside from the verbs used in the original text – which, as previously mentioned, are typical of American slang and largely untranslatable into Italian—it is interesting to examine how Morris is portrayed in both translators. Take, for example, the phrase “*Won't you just hitch up alongside of me*”. Here, the author employs a phrasal verb that is strongly associated with spoken, informal language. According to the *Collins Dictionary*, the American phrasal verb *to hitch up* means “to harness an animal to a wagon or carriage.” This suggests that Morris, being a cowboy, is entirely familiar with the expression and uses it naturally, reinforcing the authenticity and consistency of his character.

Duscovich introduces a wordplay with the term *pariglia*, which in Italian can mean both “pair/couple” and “pair of horses.” In this case, the translator appears to have aimed at capturing a double meaning: Morris’s intention to form a romantic couple with Lucy, while also subtly alluding to his background as a cowboy. On the other hand, AI translates it with the sloppy expression *doppia imbracatura*, which could be translated as “double lashing”.

As previously mentioned, Morris is one of Lucy’s suitors and is deeply in love with her. His affection is evident not only in his actions but also in the way he speaks to her.

Interestingly, the AI version uses, again, the pronoun *tu* (you singular) for relationships such as this. In the 19th century, it is sure that a suite would have used the pronoun *voi* (polite you), but apparently this is something AI cannot take into consideration without greater context.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'Little girl, I hold your hand, and you've kissed me, and if these things don't make us friends nothing ever will. Thank you for your sweet honesty to me, and good-bye.'</i> (p. 68)	"Piccola, ti tengo la mano e mi hai baciato, e se queste cose non ci rendono amiche, niente ci riuscirà mai. Grazie per la tua dolce onestà nei miei confronti, e arrivederci."	“Bambina, vi tengo le mani e voi mi avete baciato. Se questo non ci rende amici, allora nient'altro potrebbe mai farlo. Grazie per la vostra adorabile sincerità nei miei confronti. Arrivederci!” (p. 86)

Morris refers to Lucy as his “little girl,” and each version, in its own way, conveys the affection and genuine love that this rejected suitor feels for her. Duscovich captures Morris’s feelings with “*bambina*”, which expresses a closer, more tender affection. “*Piccola*” is not a completely wrong expression, but it probably lacks tender affection. To an Italian speaker it almost sounds like he would consider her “from above”.

The character of Abraham Van Helsing is introduced to the reader through Mina and John Seward. Seward describes him as “*He is a seemingly arbitrary man, this is because he knows what he is talking about better than anyone else. He is a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day, and he has, I believe, an absolutely open mind. This, with an iron nerve, a temper of the ice-brook, and indomitable resolution, self-command, and toleration exalted from virtues to blessings, and the kindest and truest heart that beats, these form his equipment for the noble work that he is doing for mankind, work both in theory and practice, for his views are as wide as his all-embracing sympathy*” (Stoker, 2011: 122).

Van Helsing is a Dutch university professor renowned as a metaphysical philosopher with an interest in the occult. He is also Seward’s former teacher and mentor. A man of great intellect, a doctor, a scholar, and a philosopher, Van Helsing combines intelligence with cunning to combat evil. In the novel, Van Helsing and Dracula serve as complementary figures, embodying contrasting worldviews in conflict.

Throughout the novel, Van Helsing’s speech occasionally reflects a foreign accent, peppered with German expressions like “*Gott in Himmel*” (“*God in Heaven*”) and “*Mein Gott*” (“*My God*”) (Stoker, 2011: 137; 171). However, his language lacks authentic Dutch inflections. Although English is not his native tongue, Van Helsing often speaks in elaborate, indirect, and philosophically mystical ways. At times, he omits verb endings or past tenses – grammatical errors inconsistent with Dutch, a language structurally similar to English in verb forms. It is therefore surprising that a scholar of his stature would make such mistakes.

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In other Italian translations analysed, among which those by Saba Sardi (2016) and Bernascone (2004), there is no consistent pattern to Van Helsing's linguistic errors in the novel and normally the Italian versions exaggerate this by portraying him almost as illiterate and struggling to communicate. Yet, as noted, Van Helsing is a cultured scientist who only occasionally slips linguistically. These translations risk reducing his complex character to a caricature of poor communication.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'You were always a careful student, and your casebook was ever more full than the rest. [...]'</i> (p. 129)	«Sei sempre stato uno studente attento e il tuo quaderno dei casi era sempre più pieno degli altri. [...]»	“Voi siete sempre stato uno studente scrupoloso e vostro elenco di ipotesi era sempre più ricco di quello di altri. [...]” (p. 166)

Also in this case, there is the socio-cultural problem of the *tu-voi* alternation to express politeness. This is another example of how AI creates a translation which – in this case – is readable and understandable, but which is completely flat and which cancels every difference in the language or in the character of who is speaking. Compared with other translations, the AI version does not feel unnatural, it just feels too “standard”.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'Perhaps I am!'</i> (p. 141)	"Forse lo sono!"	“Forse è proprio ciò che faccio!”, (p. 182)

AI fails in delivering a full-rounded character and the translation is rendered in a basic, standard Italian, where unfortunately a better and deeper insight into the character is not given.

As highlighted in the article *Translating Idiolects with a Cultural Approach in Literature. Translation Studies: Retrospective and Prospective Views* (Duscovich, Nava, 2024), Duscovich set out to develop a systematic approach that would do justice to Van Helsing's character, aiming to preserve his dignity and intellect while still reflecting his foreignness. He chose to introduce a single, consistent linguistic error that the Professor might plausibly make without undermining his image. In the Italian translation, this error involves omitting the definite article before the possessive adjective – a mistake that is believable, given that Germanic languages (such as German and Dutch) typically use possessive adjectives without an accompanying article.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'Have you said anything to our young friend the lover of her?'</i> (p. 128)	"Hai detto qualcosa al nostro giovane amico, il suo amante?"	“Avete riferito qualcosa a nostro giovane amico innamorato?” (p. 165)

This approach is exemplified in a short and simple sentence, where “to our young friend” is rendered by Duscovich as “*a nostro giovane amico*” — instead of the grammatically correct “*al nostro giovane amico*” in standard Italian, which is exactly what AI does. This is another example where the AI translation is not wrong, but where it fails to deliver the vibe of the source text.

Stoker	Google Translate	Duscovich
<i>'I have for myself thoughts at the present. Later I shall unfold to you.'</i> (p. 129)	"Al momento ho dei pensieri per me. Più tardi te li spiegherò."	“Per il momento tengo mie idee per me. Più tardi vi renderò partecipe.” (p. 165)

At times, Duscovich's choices result in instances of *overtranslation*, though these do not alter the original meaning of the text. Such decisions are driven by the desire to make the character more distinctive and to recreate the unique personality Stoker originally envisioned.

In this particular case, the English text contains no possessive adjective, yet Duscovich includes one in his translation (“*mie idee per me*”). Not surprisingly, AI decides to propose a translation which is exactly rendering the very structure of the source text and the final result is again flat. As examined before, Duscovich opts for “*mie idee per me*” (“my thoughts for myself”), adding an extra layer of emphasis that enhances the character's peculiar speech pattern.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Artificial intelligence (AI) is so called because it aims to create systems that can *exhibit, simulate, imitate, duplicate* intelligent behavior and human-like cognitive abilities. The primary goal of AI is to develop algorithms and models that enable machines to learn, reason, make decisions, and solve problems *similarly* to how humans do. The term *artificial* itself recalls further adjectives such as *manufactured, mock, not authentic*. Artificial intelligence, therefore, “does intelligent things” because it is programmed by humans. However, the ontological “extra” of individuals is represented by a rational, profound, thinking soul, by consciousness and knowledge, by the ability to make decisions or implement choices in complete freedom, and by aesthetic capacity. Considering these reflections, it becomes clear that possessing vast knowledge is not enough to understand the world in all its complexity, its wondrous richness, and its diversity. Human experience, understood as direct perception of the world through the senses and emotions, plays an irreplaceable role in shaping thought, as sensory and emotional experience is what gives depth to human knowledge.

The aim of our study is to highlight these limitations in the application of artificial intelligence in dynamic and creative contexts such as the translation processes, especially of culturally addressed texts. This can be seen in numerous examples mentioned above: it would have been extremely complex to highlight Mr Swales’ warmth and kindness toward Mina if we had relied on the mechanical translation of a software; likewise, the reference to a specific identity and cultural dimension (as in the cases highlighted before) would have been misleading and incomprehensible if we had maintained the translation proposed by the software. In this specific case, AI translation completely modifies the message of the source text. Another profound misunderstanding that shows the mere intersection of data and algorithms is the case of the sentences *be kept waitin’ when the tea is ready*, and *for it takes me time to crammle aboon the gress*: here the AI software, maybe, tried a connection between tea and deserts providing the reader with a misleading and out of context message.

Some reflections have been put forward about the dimension of locality and localization which, in our case, seems to emerge in Mr Swales’ regional accent. A regional accent is the pronunciation that distinguishes speakers of a specific geographical area, resulting from the influence of local dialects on the standard language. A dialect, considered as a variety of languages with a limited geographical or cultural scope, is an expression of a community’s history and culture. Each accent, though, has its own distinctive sounds and pronunciations, shaped by historical influences, geographical separations, and social interactions. Accent development is the first step in language change, and we know that languages evolve rapidly thanks to social and technological transformations, cultural influences, and incessant communication. It is complex to keep up with changes that occur rapidly and incessantly: for a machine it is even more so, with the result of a flattening and leveling both linguistically and culturally. Moreover, as in other examples mentioned above, the AI could not render the stream of thoughts or deep research which only a researcher like the professional translator is capable of doing.

A relevant remark is about gender. AI cannot realize if adjectives have to be put in the masculine or feminine version. *Stranger* of the original text referred to both young ladies and so had to be translated with *forestiere* (or *straniere*). AI translates it as *stranieri*, which is the plural masculine form. This example brings us back to an almost fundamental feature of the language that should not require such an effort from the software. However, beyond the linguistic error itself, this flaw reveals and exposes serious gender stereotypes. Another example, which, again, should require a greater knowledge of the context, is the use of the pronoun *tu* (you singular) rather than *voi*, more suitable, arising a significant socio-cultural problem of the *tu-voi* alternation to express politeness. AI creates a translation which annuls every difference in the language or in the personality of who is speaking.

In some other cases, AI fails to deliver the vibe of the source text or the affectionate and empathetic features of some of the characters, which Duscovich, instead, chooses, freely and conscientiously, to make.

Once again, the objective of this study is to highlight the limitations in the application of artificial intelligence in dynamic and creative contexts such as the translation process. As we have seen, the limitations seem to be a lot. It is important, though, to note that current AI still has restraints compared to human creativity. Creative ability and originality are complex and nuanced aspects that require a combination of intuition, imagination, and understanding of the social, cultural and human contexts.

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