

# Research on the Applications and Challenges of AI in Translating Shakespearean Drama

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## Abstract

Taking Zhu Shenghao's Chinese translation of *Timon of Athens* as the reference text, this paper investigates the performance and limitations of artificial intelligence in the translation of Shakespearean literature. The study selects translations generated by OpenAI's ChatGPT and DeepSeek as research corpora. Through close reading and comparative textual analysis, the paper systematically compares AI-generated translations with human translations from the perspectives of lexical choice, syntactic processing, rhetorical reproduction, and emotional expression. The findings suggest that AI performs relatively well in semantic comprehension and information transmission, producing translations that are generally clear and standardized. However, it still shows deficiencies in rendering poetic language, ironic tone, and complex character emotions. Compared with Zhu Shenghao's version, AI translations tend to exhibit a strong explicitation tendency, weakening the linguistic tension and ambiguity of the original text. This paper argues that artificial intelligence is more suitable as an auxiliary tool in Shakespearean literary translation, and that its effective application depends heavily on the literary judgment and aesthetic intervention of human translators. Human – AI collaboration may therefore become an important direction for future literary translation practice.

## Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; *Timon of Athens*; Shakespearean Literature; Literary Translation; Human–AI Collaboration; Chinese Translated Texts

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence technologies, large language models represented by ChatGPT and DeepSeek have been widely introduced into translation practice. Compared with practical text translation, literary translation—especially the translation of Shakespearean drama—involves not only semantic transfer, but also the reconstruction of rhetorical devices, character voice, dramatic tone, and aesthetic style. At the same time, literary translation is inherently polysemous: different translated versions often

vary from lexical choice to stylistic reconstruction. Existing studies have shown that introducing multiple reference translations with “meaningful variations” can improve the performance of literary machine translation. This finding indirectly indicates that current large-language-model-based translation systems still have room for improvement in handling literary texts. Therefore, the performance and limitations of artificial intelligence in literary translation have become important research topics worthy of attention.

*Timon of Athens* is one of Shakespeare’s later plays characterized by strong critical and satirical overtones. Centered on money, friendship, and the alienation of human nature, the play features sharp language, intense emotions, and extensive use of semantic rhetorical devices such as simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, and irony, as well as syntactic devices including parallelism, antithesis, repetition, and inversion. With its high rhetorical density and strong dramatic tension, the play provides an ideal textual sample for examining how AI handles rhetoric, tone, and style in literary translation.

Using Zhu Shenghao’s Chinese translation of *Timon of Athens* as the reference version, this paper selects corresponding translations generated by ChatGPT and DeepSeek for comparison. Combining close reading with comparative analysis, the study focuses on the differences among the translations in terms of rhetorical recognition, semantic transmission, syntactic rhythm, and stylistic control. The paper aims to reveal the application characteristics and major problems of AI in translating Shakespearean literature, and further explore the possible pathways and boundaries of AI participation in literary translation..

## **2. Comparative Analysis of Rhetorical Translation in *Timon of Athens***

### **2.1. Semantic Rhetorics**

Semantic rhetorics refer to linguistic phenomena that achieve rhetorical effects through lexical meaning, semantic deviation, or cognitive variation. Their core lies in the generation and transformation of meaning rather than merely formal or structural arrangement. Corbett and Connors (1999) divide rhetorical figures into tropes and schemes, with tropes emphasizing semantic transformation and schemes focusing on formal variation. This distinction provides the theoretical basis for semantic rhetorics: rhetorical effects can be realized through semantic deviation, extension of meaning, or cognitive processing.

In Chinese scholarship, semantic rhetorics are also referred to as “cognitive rhetorical figures” or “meaning-oriented rhetorical methods.” Liu Dawei (2001) emphasizes that rhetorical effects depend on semantic and cognitive mechanisms, while Chen Rudong (2010) points out that semantic rhetorics construct metaphors, metonymy, irony, and other expressive forms through semantic variation. He Aijing (2013) further argues that semantic rhetorical

discourse generally relies on relations of similarity or contiguity among things, generating meaning through semantic association and extension.

From the perspective of cognitive pragmatics, Liao Qiaoyun (2018) proposed the ADRIM model (Association - Derivation - Representation - Inheritance Model) to explain the interpretive mechanism of semantic rhetorics. According to this model, understanding semantic rhetorics requires extracting possible semantic relations between entities and constructing “A is B” -type expressions to grasp rhetorical intention. This theory directly supports the present study’s objective of exploring how semantic rhetorical discourse generates meaning and functions in language comprehension.

In sum, semantic rhetorics are not only an important component of rhetoric studies but also a significant entry point for cognitive-pragmatic research. Their focus on semantic deviation and feature extraction provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing the interpretive mechanisms of semantic rhetoric in this paper.

### 2.1.1. Irony

*Happier is he that has no friend to feed  
Than such that do e’en enemies exceed. [ Act 1 Scene 2 ]*

**Zhu Shenghao:** 与其用酒食供养这些比仇敌还凶恶的朋友，那么还是没有朋友的人幸福得多了。

**ChatGPT:** 比起无须养护的朋友的人来，那些债多情空的人更快乐。

**DeepSeek:** 没有朋友需要供养的人，比那些朋友比敌人还凶残的人更幸福。

In these two lines, the sharpness of the irony does not arise merely from the paradoxical claim that “having no friends is happier,” but rather from the implicit economic chain constructed by the verb feed. Here, “friends” are no longer members of an emotional community; instead, they become dependents who must be materially “fed” or “maintained.” Once friendship is reduced to a relationship sustained through feeding, the second line’s claim that such friends are “worse than enemies” naturally becomes a moral revelation. An enemy harms according to the logic of hostility, but friends who draw close when benefiting from one’s generosity and turn against one when those benefits disappear are even more sinister than enemies. The irony thus emerges as a cold satire built against ordinary expectations of friendship.

Zhu Shenghao’s translation—“与其用酒食供养这些比仇敌还凶恶的朋友，那么还是没有朋友的人幸福得多了”—may be regarded as the optimal version precisely because it captures the trigger point of the irony. On the one hand, the phrase “feeding with food and drink” concretizes the material dimension of feed, making the absurdity of “friends who need to be fed” immediately perceptible in Chinese. On the other hand, the structure transforms the value inversion into a form of logical judgment: the tone shifts from elaboration to decisive conclusion, allowing readers to grasp the satirical target almost instantly. What is being mocked is not the

abstract concept of “friends,” but rather parasitic social relationships themselves. The DeepSeek translation—“没有朋友需要供养的人，比那些朋友比敌人还凶残的人更幸福”—largely follows the semantic framework established by Zhu’s version. It preserves the crucial pivot of “supporting/feeding” and maintains the abnormal comparison of “friend > enemy,” so the ironic structure does not collapse entirely. However, its diction is more neutral and expository, lacking vivid tactile expressions such as Zhu’s “food and drink,” which immediately activate imagery and satirical flavor. As a result, the aggressiveness of the irony is softened, producing a more conservative rendering in which “the meaning survives, but the tone flattens.” By contrast, the ChatGPT translation—“比起无须养护朋友的人来，那些债多情空的人更快乐”—constitutes a distortion at the level of rhetorical mechanism itself. Not only does it weaken the economic metaphor of feed into the vague expression “care for,” but it further replaces the original image with the abstract phrase “burdened with debt and empty affection.” In doing so, the social critique of parasitic friendship is transformed into an unrelated reflection on emotional emptiness. Once the key image is abstracted or displaced, the causal chain upon which the irony depends is severed. Readers no longer encounter the biting satire that “having no friends is better than having such friends,” but instead receive a generalized aphoristic statement that appears smooth while fundamentally drifting away from the original meaning.

Compared against Zhu’s human translation, DeepSeek maintains a parallel trajectory in which the rhetorical mechanism is preserved though the tone is weakened, whereas ChatGPT reveals the high risk involved in replacing imagistic pivots with generalized abstractions. Once irony loses its triggering device—in this case, the economic semantics embedded in feed—the translation, however fluent, becomes a structural misreading. This example demonstrates that the true difficulty AI faces in translating dramatic irony lies not in lexical substitution itself, but in whether it can reliably identify and preserve the “pivot words” and inferential pathways upon which irony operates.

### 2.1.2. Oxymoron

*That there should be small love amongst these sweet knaves.*

*And all this courtesy! [ Act 1 Scene 1 ]*

**Zhu Shenghao:** 这些温文和气的恶人彼此不怀好意，面子上却做得这样彬彬有礼！

**ChatGPT:** 这些甜言蜜语的无赖之间，竟毫无半分真情；却偏偏摆出满脸的殷勤与客套！

**DeepSeek:** 这些甜言蜜语的恶棍之间竟无真情，却偏要满口客套！

These two lines do not construct their oxymoronic effect through abstract paradoxes, but rather by forcibly combining words with opposing values. The conflict first erupts within the phrase “sweet knaves” itself: the positive adjective “sweet” is juxtaposed directly with the derogatory “knaves,” causing the gentle and

pleasant outward appearance to clash with the base and villainous inner nature within a single modifying structure. The subsequent contrast between “small love” and “all this courtesy” then externalizes this inner contradiction into the logic of social interaction: genuine affection is scarce, yet politeness and ceremony abound; the more elaborate the courtesy, the more clearly it exposes emotional emptiness and the falseness of social relationships.

Zhu Shenghao renders this mechanism through one of the most dramatically effective expressions in Chinese. His phrase “温文和气的恶人” accurately reproduces the contradiction between “sweet” and “knaves,” while the word “villains” firmly anchors the phrase in a negative semantic field, turning “温文和气” into a barbed ironic modifier. More importantly, his translation of “small love” as “彼此不怀好意” intensifies the original meaning from mere emotional thinness to moral hostility, greatly heightening the satirical force. Meanwhile, “outwardly behaving with such refined courtesy” reveals “courtesy” as nothing more than performative social decorum, making both the social context and the satirical direction unmistakably clear.

The ChatGPT translation similarly preserves the oxymoronic pairing through the phrase “甜言蜜语的无赖,” while “满脸的殷勤与客套” strengthens the visual sense of social performance, allowing readers almost immediately to picture a smiling hypocrite. However, it renders “small love” as “not the slightest trace of genuine feeling,” shifting the degree from “little” to “none.” This makes the tone more forceful and the judgment more absolute. Although such intensification increases the immediacy of the criticism, it also slightly alters the original’s restrained and coldly ironic scale, replacing nuanced sarcasm with harsher condemnation.

The DeepSeek version adopts a more compressed style. Expressions such as “甜言蜜语的恶棍” and “满口客套” are concise and forceful, successfully preserving both the oxymoronic core and the contrastive structure. Moreover, “empty courtesy” itself carries a negative connotation. Yet because the translation omits cues such as “outwardly” or “for appearance’s sake,” readers must rely more heavily on context to understand “courtesy” as a performative social façade. Consequently, some of the dramatic buildup and tonal modulation of the original are weakened.

Viewed side by side, Zhu’s translation proves most capable of transforming the oxymoron into a vivid chain of social satire, preserving both the lexical contradiction and the surrounding dramatic context. ChatGPT amplifies the satirical impact through stronger negation and richer performative imagery, though at the risk of over-absolutizing the tone. DeepSeek, by contrast, succeeds through brevity, preserving the structural core of the contradiction while sacrificing some contextual layering and dramatic tension in the dialogue.

## 2.2. Syntactic Rhetorics

Syntactic rhetoric, also known as schemes in rhetorical figures, primarily achieves

rhetorical effects through sentence structure and word order rather than through changes in lexical meaning.[10] It includes such forms as parallelism, antithesis, repetition, and inversion, all of which enhance the expressiveness and persuasiveness of language through structural symmetry, rhythm, and shifts in emphasis (Lanham, 1991)

Unlike semantic rhetoric, which focuses on innovation in meaning, syntactic rhetoric centers on formal organization: it employs syntactic patterns to direct readers' attention, reinforce key points, or create emotional effects.[11] Structural symmetry and repetition not only improve textual readability, but also indirectly strengthen semantic expression (Herrick, 2008).[12] From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, syntactic rhetoric helps readers establish psychological rhythms and expectations in language, thereby facilitating the comprehension and retention of information (Gibbs, 1994).

### 2.2.1. Parallelism

*Grant I may never prove so fond,  
To trust man on his oath or bond,  
Or a harlot for her weeping  
Or a dog that seems a-seeping,  
Or a keeper with my freedom,  
Or my friends if I should need 'em. [ Act 1 Scene 2 ]*

**Zhu Shenghao:** 保佑我不要做个呆子, 相信人们空口的盟誓; 也不要相信娼妓的泪; 也不要相信狗的假寐; 也不要相信我的狱吏, 或是我患难中的知己。

**ChatGPT:** 愿我永不如斯愚笨, 轻信人的誓言和契约; 信任妓女的哭泣; 信任看似酣睡的狗; 信任窃贼对我自由的守护; 或者信任当我需要时的朋友。

**DeepSeek:** 愿我永不愚蠢至此, 轻信人的誓言或契约, 轻信妓女的眼泪, 轻信假寐的狗, 轻信看守给我的自由, 或轻信患难中的朋友。

The syntactic force of this parallel structure derives from the continuous progression of a shared grammatical framework. The optative opening, “Grant I may never...,” first establishes the tonal foundation, after which a series of objects—“oath or bond,” “harlot,” “dog,” “keeper,” and “friends”—are successively accumulated through coordinating conjunctions. This creates a rhetorical chain characterized by rhythmic intensification and a semantic progression in which potential objects of trust are negated one after another.

Zhu’s translation renders the English parallel structure naturally into Chinese through the repeated pattern “也不要相信.....,” producing a clear word order, stable rhythm, and strongly imagistic expressions such as “空口的盟誓,” “娼妓的泪,” “狗的假寐,” “狱吏,” and “患难中的知己.” Readers can almost hear the dramatic progression and escalating sarcasm in each recurring “也不要.” More importantly, the institutional implication of “oath or bond” is transformed into “空口的盟誓,” while the irony of “friends if I should need 'em” culminates in “患难中的知己.” In

this way, the translation preserves the syntactic structure while sharpening the pragmatic edge of the original, making the “striking force” of the parallelism especially powerful.

ChatGPT’s version maintains the enumerative structure at the grammatical level, yet the regularity of the parallelism is weakened. The first two items are connected with semicolons, and although the later elements remain coordinated, the phrase “信任窃贼对我自由的守护” introduces a significant semantic deviation. The original “keeper with my freedom” refers to a jailer or custodian in relation to one’s freedom, not a “thief,” and this mistranslation disrupts the logical coherence of the parallel chain. At the same time, the translation fails to consistently reproduce a stable syntactic scaffold, such as the repeated use of “信任.....” or “轻信.....,” resulting in a recitative rhythm that lacks the sonorous momentum of Zhu’s version. Consequently, the parallelism shifts from “syntactically driven progression” to a mere “stacking of information.”

DeepSeek’s translation is stronger in terms of syntactic consistency. By repeatedly using the verb “轻信,” it constructs a more recognizable parallel framework, allowing readers to feel the accumulating rhythmic pressure of “轻信—轻信—轻信.” However, its diction appears comparatively formalized and conceptualized, and the vividness of the imagery is less striking than in Zhu’s version. In addition, phrases such as “轻信人的誓言或契约” and “轻信看守给我的自由” sound somewhat awkward in Chinese collocation. In the English original, the coordination between “to trust...” and “Or...” carries the flowing quality of a spoken prayer or curse; here, although the repeated “轻信” reinforces formal parallelism, it also makes the tone resemble rational admonition more than dramatic imprecation.

Measured against the same standard of parallelism, Zhu’s translation most successfully transforms the original coordinated structure into rhythmically recitable Chinese units while sustaining imagistic tension and ironic emphasis in each segment. DeepSeek preserves the neatness of the structure and the formal beauty of repeated verbs, yet its language feels flatter and at times rigid in collocation. ChatGPT, despite attempting to maintain the enumerative pattern, weakens the progressive force of the parallelism through semantic mistranslation and unstable syntactic scaffolding, even altering the original ironic chain centered on the collapse of trust.

### 2.2.2. Antithesis

*Ah, when the means are gone that buy this praise,*

*The breath is gone whereof this praise is made:*

*Feast-won, fast-lost [ Act 2 Scene 2 ]*

**Zhu Shenghao:** 唉！花费了无数的钱财，买到人家一声赞美，钱财一旦去手，赞美的声音也寂灭了。酒食上得来的朋友，等到酒尽樽空，转眼成为路人。

**ChatGPT:** 唉，一旦用来买来这些赞美的财力消失，构成这些赞美的气息也随之散

尽：筵席上赢来的，转瞬即逝。

**DeepSeek:** 唉，买来赞美的财富一旦耗尽，赞美的气息也随之消散：宴席赢来的，转眼失去。

The rhetorical organization of this contrastive sequence is exceptionally tight. The first two lines employ a parallel “means—breath” structure that locks the material basis of praise and its linguistic manifestation into a causal chain, creating a stark value contrast: where wealth remains, praise survives; where wealth disappears, praise dies. The third line, “Feast-won, fast-lost,” further compresses the opposition between gain and loss into a highly condensed antithetical phrase that functions almost like an aphorism. Semantically, something is “won at the feast,” yet situationally it is “lost at once.” Through parallel form and phonetic resemblance, the line intensifies the ironic impact of transience and instability.

In rendering this chain of contrasts into Chinese, Zhu adopts a more narrative and expansive strategy. He first makes the transactional logic of “means buy praise” explicit by translating it into the socially recognizable act of “buying praise” with money: “花费了无数的钱财，买到人家一声赞美” He then preserves the decisive contrastive closure of “wealth gone—praise gone” through the line “once the money leaves one’s hands, the sound of praise is extinguished as well.” Immediately afterward, he expands the aphoristic third line into “酒食上得来的朋友…酒尽樽空…转眼成为路人,” transforming the abstract opposition of “gain and loss” into the palpable collapse of social relationships. In this way, the contrast moves from the economic sphere into the interpersonal sphere, and the satire acquires greater dramatic tension and social critical force. The trade-off, however, is that the rhythmic unit becomes elongated: the terse aphoristic sharpness and sonic force of “Feast-won, fast-lost” are partially diluted through expansion, though this is compensated for by clearer pragmatic direction and stronger readability.

Both the ChatGPT and DeepSeek translations tend instead to preserve the compactness of the original structure. They render “means gone—breath gone” as variations of “一旦买赞的财力消失/赞美的气息也随之散尽（消散），” presenting the contrast directly through symmetrical sentence patterns. The logic remains clear and closer to the epigrammatic style of the source text. Likewise, “Feast-won, fast-lost” is translated as “筵席上赢来的，转瞬即逝/宴席赢来的，转眼失去,” with expressions such as “转瞬” or “转眼” making the temporal dimension of “fast” more explicit, allowing readers to grasp immediately the irony of “gained through feasting—lost with extreme speed.” Between the two AI versions, ChatGPT’s phrase “构成这些赞美的气息” corresponds more faithfully to the generative imagery of “breath... is made,” though it carries a slightly explanatory, academic tone; DeepSeek’s “breath of praise” is more concise and tonally colder.

Compared with the AI versions, Zhu’s translation is particularly effective in extending the contrast into a complete satirical chain of “money—praise—friends,” so that “feast-won, fast-lost” becomes not merely a moral observation but a vivid

social tableau. By contrast, the AI translations excel in preserving the compression, symmetry, and aphoristic force of the original, producing a sharper sense of formal balance and rhythmic precision, though they are less explicit than Zhu's version in pointing toward the deeper social and interpersonal implications. Overall, this example clearly demonstrates that contrastive rhetoric in translation can either achieve pragmatic concreteness through expansion or maintain epigrammatic intensity through structural alignment; the difference between these approaches directly determines the relative weight of "social satire" and "formal rhetorical force" in the translated text.

### 2.3. Phonetic Rhetorics

In stylistic studies, phonetic rhetoric is regarded as one of the essential levels of linguistic expression.[13] In his classic work *Stylistics*, I. R. Galperin explicitly argues that the aesthetic effect of language depends not only on semantics and structure, but also on "how the sounds of language act upon the perception of the recipient"; in other words, sound itself possesses an independent expressive potential. Phonostylistics is precisely concerned with how such phonetic features influence readers' or listeners' emotions and processes of comprehension through auditory stimulation. Within this framework, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and rhythm are regarded as typical phonetic rhetorical devices. Through the repetition and arrangement of phonemes, they create specific acoustic patterns that actively participate in the construction of meaning.

From a functional perspective, phonetic rhetoric mainly manifests itself in three aspects. The first is the euphonic function, whereby repetition and symmetry of sound endow language with musicality and rhythm, thus enhancing the artistic expressiveness of a text. The second is the imitative or sound-symbolic function, through which sounds evoke particular sensory and emotional associations, allowing readers to experience semantic meaning at an auditory level. The third is the emphatic function: repetition of sounds foregrounds key words within the flow of speech, thereby intensifying expressive force.

Furthermore, phonetic rhetoric also possesses significant pragmatic functions. Studies have shown that sonic language can directly stimulate readers' responses through auditory perception, thereby achieving meaning transmission and emotional manipulation on a higher level. In literary texts, especially in poetry and dramatic language, phonetic form often works in close conjunction with semantics: sound patterns reinforce tonal progression and emotional tension, realizing a mechanism in which "sound governs meaning." Phonetic rhetoric, therefore, should not be regarded as a merely decorative feature, but as an important means of meaning production.

Based on the above theoretical framework, the reproduction of phonetic rhetoric in translations of Shakespearean drama is of particular importance. If a translation

remains confined to semantic transfer without reconstructing corresponding acoustic rhythm and expressive force in the target language, then the emphasis, progression, and emotional impact achieved through sound in the source text will inevitably be weakened. This is precisely why AI translations, when dealing with phonetic rhetorical devices such as alliteration, often shift from a mechanism of “sound governing meaning” to one of “meaning marking speed.”

### 2.3.1. Alliteration

*Feast-won, fast-lost* [Act 1 Scene 2]

**Zhu Shenghao:** 酒食上得来的朋友，等到酒尽樽空，转眼成为路人。

**ChatGPT:** 筵席上赢来的，转瞬即失。

**DeepSeek:** 宴席赢来的，转眼失去。

The alliteration in this passage is concentrated almost entirely in the final line, “Feast-won, fast-lost.” The repeated initial /f/ sound acoustically binds “won through feasting” and “lost with haste” into a single phonetic unit, so that readers first experience, at the auditory level, a rhythm of “parallelism—collision—sudden drop,” before recognizing semantically the irony of gain turning instantly into loss. Here, alliteration is therefore not a decorative embellishment, but a device that directly inscribes the aphorism’s sense of speed and coldness into its very mechanism of pronunciation.

In handling this phonetic device, Zhu adopts a typical human-translator strategy of compensation. Rather than attempting to reproduce the literal /f/ repetition in Chinese—which lacks the same structural conditions for initial consonant patterning—he expands the aphoristic “Feast-won, fast-lost” into “酒食上得来的朋友，等到酒尽樽空，转眼成为路人” Through the sequence “wine and food → wine exhausted and cups emptied → in the blink of an eye,” Zhu constructs a rhythmic chain of sudden temporal reversal, while the shift from “friends” to “strangers” intensifies the satirical impact through a dramatic collapse of social identity. In pragmatic terms, this achieves a successful transfer of the “sense of rapid downfall” originally carried by the alliteration. Yet such expansion inevitably dilutes the compression and incantatory acoustic force of the source line: the sharp blade of the aphorism is stretched into a longer, more narrative arc.

By contrast, both the ChatGPT and DeepSeek translations tend to preserve the compactness of the original structure. They render the final line as variations of “筵席上赢来的，转瞬即失/宴席赢来的，转眼失去,” maintaining a concise, balanced rhythm in Chinese while using expressions such as “转眼” or “转眼” to make explicit the speed semantics of “fast.” In this way, they reconstruct the temporal sensation of sudden collapse within the target language. However, neither version attempts to compensate for the auditory hook of the /f/ alliteration through phonological resources available in Chinese, such as consonantal repetition, assonance, or parallel homophonic structures. Consequently, their effect relies more on semantic adverbs

than on sound itself, and the original alliterative mechanism of “sound governing meaning” is largely transformed in translation into one of “meaning marking speed.” From the perspective of sound patterning, the three translations reveal two distinct strategies. Zhu’s version compensates for the loss of acoustic impact through contextual expansion and relational contrast, strengthening the work’s social satire at the cost of aphoristic compression. The two AI translations, on the other hand, preserve the force of the short sentence through structural symmetry and temporal adverbs, making the irony immediately intelligible to readers, yet they struggle to recreate in Chinese the “instantaneous auditory plunge” produced by the repeated initial sounds of the original. If alliteration is taken as the analytical focus, this example demonstrates particularly well that English alliteration in short aphoristic lines functions as a kind of “rhythmic accelerator,” whereas Chinese translation can usually compensate only through parallelism, four-character phrasing, temporal adverbs, or semantic contrast, rarely achieving a truly isomorphic effect of repeated initial consonants.

### 3. Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of representative rhetorical passages in *Timon of Athens*, it can be observed that AI-generated translations and the translation by Zhu Shenghao display relatively consistent differences in translational orientation and textual effect. Overall, AI translations demonstrate clear advantages in semantic transmission and structural correspondence. They are generally capable of reproducing the informational content of the source text with considerable accuracy, while enhancing clarity and readability through logical explicitation and standardized expression. However, this generation mechanism, oriented toward “explicitness,” also tends to weaken the subtlety and tension of literary language when dealing with rhetorically dense and tonally complex texts. This tendency is manifested in the simplification of metaphor, the attenuation of irony, and the flattening of rhetorical rhythm. In some cases, pragmatic focus may even shift or lexical meaning may be misinterpreted, thereby affecting the overall literary impact of the translation.

By contrast, Zhu Shenghao’s translation achieves a more balanced transformation between semantics and rhetoric. On the one hand, his translation is not constrained by formal equivalence; instead, through flexible adjustments of syntactic structure and modes of expression, the rhetoric of the original text is rendered naturally within the Chinese linguistic context. On the other hand, Zhu places particular emphasis on rhetorical momentum and dramatic rhythm. Through devices such as repetition, parallelism, and tonal intensification, he effectively preserves the emotional force and satirical sharpness of the source text. At the pragmatic level, moreover, his translation often succeeds in accurately capturing the characters’ positions and the directional force of their speech, enabling rhetoric not merely to

remain “visible,” but also to retain its persuasive and dramatic power. Taken together, the differences between AI-generated translation and human translation in literary translation fundamentally reflect the divergence between two orientations: one that prioritizes semantics, and another that prioritizes rhetoric and pragmatics. The former emphasizes informational completeness and clarity of expression, making it suitable for comprehension-oriented text processing; the latter places greater importance on aesthetic reconstruction and linguistic performance. Especially in texts such as Shakespearean drama, which depend heavily on rhetoric and rhetorical momentum, human translation continues to demonstrate irreplaceable strengths. Consequently, the appropriate role of artificial intelligence in literary translation should be understood primarily as that of an auxiliary tool—for example, in producing draft translations, aligning textual structures, and verifying semantic content—whereas crucial rhetorical handling and stylistic modulation still rely on the comprehensive judgment and aesthetic experience of human translators.

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