

Prompting Poetry: Assessing ChatGPT 4o's Capacity in Poetry Translation

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Abstract

This study investigates the potential of generative artificial intelligence in the translation of poetry, focusing on Sylvia Plath's "Child" as a central case. Guided by André Lefevere's strategies, seven distinct prompts were designed to generate English-to-Turkish translations, aiming to assess how AI responds to targeted instructions and whether it can engage with the specific demands of poetic language. The research employs a qualitative methodology to evaluate the extent to which AI can address the challenges of literary translation. With this approach, the study provides a perspective on how poetry, traditionally viewed as one of the most translation-resistant forms, is reinterpreted within a digital environment. The analysis assesses AI's performance in terms of prompt responsiveness. Accordingly, it highlights the relationship between artificial intelligence and strategic translation processes, contributing to ongoing discussions at the intersection of technology, translation, and literature.

Keywords: poetry translation, AI, ChatGPT, Sylvia Plath, prompt, Lefevere

Komutlarla Şiir:

ChatGPT 4o'nun Şiir Çevirisindeki Kapasitesinin Değerlendirilmesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, üretken yapay zeka teknolojilerinin şiir çevirisindeki potansiyelini ele almakta ve Sylvia Plath'ın "Child" adlı şiirini örnek olarak incelemektedir. Lefevere'in çeviri stratejilerinden hareketle oluşturulan yedi farklı komut, şiirin İngilizceden Türkçeye çevirisi için kullanılmış ve yapay zekanın hedefe yönelik komutlar üzerinden ürettiği çeviri metinlerde şiir dilinin özel gerekliliklerine ne ölçüde yanıt verebildiği değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmada nitel bir yöntem benimsenerek yapay zekanın edebi çeviri bağlamındaki zorlukları aşma kapasitesi analiz edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, çeviriye en dirençli türlerden biri olarak görülen şiirin dijital ortamda nasıl yeniden yorumlandığına dair bir bakış açısı sunulmaktadır. Analiz, yapay zekanın komutlara yanıt verebilme performansını değerlendirmektedir. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, yapay zeka ile strateji temelli çeviri süreçleri arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanarak, teknoloji, çeviri ve edebiyatın kesişimindeki güncel tartışmalara katkı sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: şiir çevirisi, yapay zeka, ChatGPT, Sylvia Plath, komut, Lefevere

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INTRODUCTION

It all began with a fundamental question: “Can machines think?” (Turing, 1950, p. 344). Since the 1950s, the realization that they could has triggered an accelerating wave of technological change, influencing nearly every aspect of human life. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has been unprecedented in both speed and scope. Today, it permeates virtually every discipline and profession, and translation studies is no exception.

For a long time, it was widely believed that while machines might simulate thought, they lacked the creative faculties unique to human beings. This belief offered a sense of security for many fields, particularly those grounded in artistic or interpretive practices. Yet, with the advent of generative artificial intelligence capable of producing text, speech, images, videos, and even code, this assumption is increasingly being challenged. Machines are no longer confined to mimicking human cognition; they now participate in content creation across domains. This transformation has influenced translators, students, educators, practitioners, and researchers. Although debate continues within translation studies regarding the desirability of AI use in translation, AI-generated outputs have become functionally adequate for general audiences.

As a result of these developments, the central question has shifted from “Can machines translate?” to “Can machines translate like humans?” Regarding the answer, we are arguably at a critical juncture, as the rapid evolution of AI technologies is actively reshaping the boundaries of translation practices and capturing this transformation while it unfolds is essential. This study, therefore, seeks to trace the trajectory of artificial intelligence within translation studies, with particular emphasis on its current and emerging role in poetry translation, a field often considered the most creative and challenging dimension of literary translation.

Recent independent studies have each contributed meaningfully to the field of poetry translation. Gözde Begüm Aküzüm (2025) for instance, offers a fresh perspective on translation criticism through human-rendered poetic texts, while Ökkeş Hengil and Mehmet Şayır (2024) engage Lefevere’s strategies via human translation outputs. Betül Özcan Dost (2025), on the other hand, explores AI-generated poetry translations prompted through Dryden’s tripartite model, thus foregrounding the role of instruction in machine translation. This study builds on these emerging directions, yet distinguishes itself by bringing together prompt-driven AI translation and a comprehensive theoretical model, namely Lefevere’s seven strategies. The central research question that drives this investigation is: What happens when a machine is asked to translate poetry not freely, but by following the distinct pathways defined by a translation theorist? In pursuing this question the research assesses ChatGPT-4o’s capacity for poetry translation through the lens of Lefevere’s seven strategies. Sylvia Plath’s poem “Child” serves as the corpus for this inquiry. Targeted prompts aligned with each strategy guide the AI-generated English-to-Turkish translations, and enable an analysis of how AI responds to distinct translational instructions and navigates the stylistic and poetic demands of literary translation.

1. POETRY TRANSLATION

Poetry is a unique literary genre that draws heavily on aesthetics, emotion, rhythm, and condensed meaning. As a delicate mode of expression, it constructs a multidimensional structure of meaning, pushing the boundaries of both language and emotion. This very nature renders its relationship with translation particularly complex. Translating poetry requires an understanding of “imagery, unique ethno-specific lexicons, and distinct poetic structures in various syntactic arrangements” that goes beyond surface-level linguistic fidelity (Karaban and Karaban, 2024, p. 2). Thus, poetry translation involves more than analyzing a source text and reproducing it in the target domain. A successful translation cannot exist without a grasp of “the notion of shape, repetition, and pattern and how these are viewed in both source and target cultures,” that is, without understanding poetic style (Boase-Beier, 2013, p. 477).

What further complicates poetry translation is the inseparability of form and meaning. In poetry, form does not only contain content; it actively shapes meaning and emotional resonance. Elements such as rhythm, meter, enjambment, and visual layout contribute to this dynamic in stylistically specific ways, creating additional challenges for translators. The translator must therefore attend to both the message and the medium through which it is conveyed. This dual responsibility demands both linguistic and literary competencies, but it also opens a space for creative freedom. It is thus understandable that many poetry translators are poets themselves. Yet even for them, achieving a true balance remains difficult. One of poetry’s defining features is its open-ended universe of meaning. Through ambiguity, symbolism, and literary devices, each poem evokes unique responses from readers. As a culturally embedded art form that conveys the most with the least, poetry challenges even native speakers. In contrast, translation demands a singular interpretation to be transferred into the target culture, raising the persistent problem of translatability. For this reason, the question of poetry’s untranslatability has remained a central concern within translation studies.

As Susan Bassnett (2014, p. 92) notes, poetry has attracted more scholarly attention than any other literary genre in translation studies; yet much of the existing research focuses on comparative case studies or personal accounts of translators, while non-empirical, methodological discussions, arguably the most needed, remain scarce. Offering a complementary perspective, Lawrence Venuti (2011, p. 127) suggests that poetry translation encourages experimental strategies that can reveal what is distinctive about translation as a linguistic and cultural practice. More recently, Hengil and Şayır (2024, p. 990) highlight that the fundamental questions surrounding poetry translation persist: concerns over textual equivalence, the emergence of new poems in the target language, the preservation of meaning–form balance, and the linguistic and poetic competence required of the translator continue to occupy scholarly debate. The increasing influence of technology in translation contexts further amplifies the need to revisit these foundational issues.

The literature on poetry translation, like that on translation itself, initially adopted a prescriptive approach. Early studies (Burnshaw, 1960; Rees, 1990, as cited in Boase-Beier, 2013, p. 480) advocated for prose translation as a means to preserve semantic clarity. However, this view contrasts with the inherently interpretive and open-ended nature of poetic language. Contemporary

debates now often revolve around the issue of creativity, distinguishing between translations that remain faithful to the source and versions that function as independent poems (Heaney's term, as cited in Tymoczko, 2007, p. 58). Within this frame, compromise is often found in accepting that loss is an inevitable feature of poetry translation, but that such loss does not negate the legitimacy of the translated work. Following this acceptance, the translator must first uncover the deep meaning of the poem through stylistic analysis and then recreate this meaning within the cultural context of the target audience. This form of *recreation*, recognized as an essential aspect of translation, was first conceptualized by Jakobson in 1959 (as cited in Boase-Beier, 2013, p. 478).

Today, the diversification of meaning-making processes and the expanding definition of translation have contributed to a broader, more dynamic understanding of both translation in general and poetry translation. Christian Matthiessen (2021), for example, adopts a semiotic view of language, defining translation as context-based meaning reconstruction through choice at both the source interpretation and target text generation stages. Similarly, Kobus Marais (2019) advocates for a biosemiotic approach that expands translation beyond human language, covering meaning-making across biological, ecological, and social systems, and thereby reframing translation as a dynamic and adaptive process within a wider semiotic continuum.

2. AI AND MACHINE TRANSLATION

The relationship between translation and technology is not new. For decades, translation studies has benefited from technological tools aimed at assisting human translators by reducing workload and enhancing textual consistency. Initially, these tools were conceived as supplementary, based on the premise that only humans, equipped with cultural, contextual, and experiential knowledge, could truly translate. But today, machine translation systems have evolved to the point where they can produce reasonably coherent drafts for everyday communication, often requiring light post-editing, which results in AI anxiety among translators (Taşkın, et al., 2025, p. 18). These technologies raise questions not only about the limits of machine creativity but also about the computational modelling of poetic interpretation. Research on AI technologies and translation is increasingly being done particularly in the last five years in many different languages. Evaluating AI-generated poetry through established translation strategies offers insight into both the potential and the limitations of artificial intelligence in handling the most human kind of literary forms.

To conduct such an evaluation, a basic understanding of the evolution of machine translation and AI-based translation technologies is essential. At this stage, it is important to distinguish between machine translation systems and AI-driven translation practices. Machine translation (MT) has progressed through three main paradigms: rule-based machine translation (RBMT), statistical machine translation (SMT), and neural machine translation (NMT) (Yılmaz, 2023, p. 343). Each represents a significant step in the development of automated translation. RBMT relies on predefined grammatical rules and dictionaries, SMT works through statistical correlations drawn from bilingual corpora, and NMT, the current dominant model, uses artificial neural networks to generate context-aware translations. Popular systems such as Google Translate, Bing Translator, and DeepL now rely on NMT, typically operating through encoder-decoder architectures.

By contrast, ChatGPT belongs to a broader category of artificial intelligence and is built on a different logic. Translation is just one of many capabilities it offers. AI is commonly categorized into three levels: artificial narrow intelligence (ANI), artificial general intelligence (AGI), and artificial superintelligence (ASI). These categories reflect increasing degrees of complexity. ANI refers to systems that perform specific tasks within limited parameters. AGI, not yet realized, would mimic human-level cognition across domains. ASI, a theoretical stage, would exceed human cognitive abilities entirely (Anyoha, 2017; O'Carol, 2017; Saghiri et al., 2022, as cited in Yoşumaz, 2025, p. 3). Current tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini still operate under ANI and are designed to function within well-defined constraints. Despite recent advancements that simulate “human-like” qualities, it is important to recognize that we are still operating within a limited framework at present.

AI systems draw on various subfields,¹ including machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing (NLP). ChatGPT, in particular, is a neural network-based large language model built for NLP tasks. It is based on the Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) architecture, which enables advanced language understanding and context-aware response generation (Wang et al., 2024, p. 14025). Unlike traditional MT tools like Google Translate, ChatGPT can generate coherent text, summarize content, translate across languages, and maintain dialogue, all through learned patterns in natural language use. Beginning with GPT-3.5 in 2022, OpenAI has released successive models, GPT-4 in 2023 and GPT-4o in 2024, each expanding the model's reasoning ability, multimodal integration, and overall responsiveness.

This study uses GPT-4o, the most advanced version currently available, selected for its enhanced reasoning capabilities. GPT-4o is a multimodal model developed by OpenAI, capable of processing and generating not only text but also image and audio inputs. Its ability to perform complex reasoning across modalities has made it applicable not only in industrial contexts but also in creative domains such as poetry writing and music composition. In their study on the role of AI in creating poetry, James Hutson and Ana Schnellman (2023, p. 11), assert that further research is needed in this respect.

What distinguishes ChatGPT from conventional translation tools is the central role of prompts. Chatbots like ChatGPT are designed to interact with users in natural language and generate responses based on provided prompts (Pekçoşkun Güner and Güner, 2023, p. 741). This has led to the emergence of prompt engineering, a practice that involves crafting input strategically to guide the system's output. In translation, prompt engineering has become a key factor in rethinking the extent to which machines can replicate or approximate human translation. A 2024 study, for instance, reports that “the proficiency of ChatGPT-4 in poem translation surpasses that of Google

¹ These include machine learning (data-driven pattern recognition), deep learning (neural network-based hierarchical learning), natural language processing (understanding and generating human language), computer vision (interpreting visual input), expert systems (rule-based decision-making), robotics (physical interaction and automation), artificial neural networks (brain-inspired computation), as well as more specialized domains such as reinforcement learning, evolutionary algorithms, fuzzy logic, swarm intelligence, multi-agent systems, affective computing, and knowledge representation and reasoning, all of which contribute to the development of intelligent systems with diverse capabilities.

and Bing Translate, which often produce mechanical, incoherent, or even nonsensical renditions” (Xingzhong, 2024, p. 32). In this sense, Google Translate increasingly represents an earlier phase of technological development, whereas AI tools like ChatGPT open up new possibilities for literary translation and machine-assisted creativity.

As Özcan Dost (2025, p. 25) observes, most studies on AI-generated translation focus on presenting a source text and analyzing the output without specifying the translation method used. This stands in contrast to human translation, particularly in creative genres such as poetry, where method and intention are closely linked. Responding to this gap, the present study investigates how ChatGPT performs when prompted explicitly to follow specific translation strategies. Lefevere’s seven strategies for poetry translation offer a suitable framework for evaluating the model’s responsiveness to such guided tasks.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining comparative textual analysis along with expert-based evaluation to assess how AI-generated outputs align with Lefevere’s seven poetry translation strategies. The qualitative component allows for an exploration of the open-ended nature of translation, particularly in the context of poetry, while also examining the creative potential of AI in literary production. As qualitative research is shaped by its specific context, its findings are inherently non-replicable (Johnston and Vanderstoep, 2009, p. 170, as cited in Aydoğan and Akoğlu, 2024, p. 54). This observation is especially relevant given the rapid evolution of AI technologies and the importance of capturing their development as it unfolds.

Regarding the evaluation method, a human-based evaluation has been adopted rather than automated metrics, owing to the distinctive nature of this research, namely, assessing prompt responsiveness within the framework of poetry translation strategies. Although automated evaluation metrics, such as BLEU (Bilingual Evaluation Understudy), METEOR (Metric for Evaluation of Translation with Explicit Ordering), ROUGE (Recall-Oriented Understudy for Gisting Evaluation), and RIBES (Rank-Based Intuitive Bilingual Evaluation Score), are widely used in machine translation research (Chauhan and Philemon, 2023), they are not suitable for evaluating poetry translations. BLEU, for example, measures lexical overlap and penalizes legitimate lexical variation, while METEOR includes synonym and stem matching but still operates on surface-level similarity. These metrics are not designed to assess the stylistic nuance, interpretive richness, and aesthetic dimension inherent to poetry.

Moreover, while more comprehensive frameworks such as MQM can assess fluency, accuracy, and style (Lommel et al., 2014, as cited in Çetin and Duran, 2024, p. 127) the present study does not aim to evaluate fidelity or structural equivalence per se. Instead, it focuses on how effectively ChatGPT’s outputs fulfill prompt-based poetic translation strategies. Therefore, this study adopts a custom human evaluation framework based on prompt responsiveness as primary criterion. Each output is assessed using qualitative descriptors, surface-level, moderate, or high, to reflect the degree to which the model fulfilled the stylistic and functional expectations of each strategy. In this framework, *surface-level* achievement refers to instances where the AI demonstrates only a minimal

degree of functionality, often with significant shortcomings. *Moderate* achievement describes outputs where the AI fulfills the basic requirements of the task but exhibits notable faults or inconsistencies. *High* achievement corresponds to cases where the AI responds effectively to the prompt, with coherent creativity and relatively few deficiencies.

To complement the textual analysis and minimize subjectivity, the study incorporates expert opinions through semi-structured interviews. Ten participants, each holding a PhD in Translation Studies and possessing scholarly expertise in literary translation, were selected through purposive sampling. They were interviewed to elicit their insights on how each AI-generated poem fulfills its respective translation strategy. Their responses to each prompt-based translation are integrated into the corresponding analytical sections.

4. LEFEVERE'S POETRY TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Given the rapid pace of AI development and the necessity of documenting such transformation as it happens, Lefevere's seven translation strategies provide the analytical framework for assessing AI-generated translations of Sylvia Plath's poem "Child". It is therefore essential to situate both Lefevere's work and Plath's poem within the broader context of translation studies and literary analysis.

Alongside scholars such as Gideon Toury and James Holmes, Lefevere played a foundational role in establishing translation studies as an academic field. Together with Susan Bassnett, he introduced the "cultural turn" in translation studies, shifting the focus from purely linguistic concerns to broader social, cultural, and communicative dimensions (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1998). Their work emphasizes the cultural and ideological forces that shape translation practices and translator behavior. This orientation renders Lefevere's model particularly adaptable to the present study, where technological influences constitute a new shaping force in translation contexts. One of Lefevere's key contributions is the conceptualization of translation as a form of rewriting, that is, the transformation of a text to serve specific purposes, either within the same language or across languages (Lefevere, 1992). In this regard, poetry translation itself can also be regarded as a rewriting process as argued by Göksenin Abdal and Büşra Yaman (2017), who emphasize how the source text is rewritten under new contextual influences. Additionally, translation, in general terms, is situated alongside other forms of rewriting such as criticism, summary, adaptation, and scripting, all of which are guided by ideological or poetic agendas that affect how the source text is recontextualized. In the present study, those shaping agendas are technological.

Lefevere's approach to poetry translation is crucial for this study. Reflecting the prescriptive tendencies of the 1970s, Lefevere (1975) argued that a poetry translator must approach the text as a whole, possess both linguistic competence and literary-cultural knowledge, and aim to preserve the communicative function of the original. For him, language skills or poetic talent alone are insufficient without informed, intentional translation (cf. Yetkin, 2007, p. 147). In *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (1975), he outlines seven strategies and demonstrates them using the Latin poem "Catullus 64". Building on this work, Nihal Yetkin (2007) applied the same strategies to a Turkish context using the song "I Did It My Way" by Frank Sinatra. More recently, Hengil and

Şayır (2024) explored Lefevere's strategies through comparative analyses of English–Turkish and Arabic–Turkish poetry translations.

Although Lefevere's framework was originally developed to assess human translation, this study applies it to AI-generated poetry to evaluate whether traditional models can still account for new forms of machine creativity. This reflexive approach acknowledges both the continuities and the tensions between literary translation theory and computational practice. To pursue this analysis, an understanding of each of Lefevere's seven strategies is essential (Lefevere, 1975).

- 1- **Phonemic Translation:** As the name suggests, this approach prioritizes replicating the original text's sound in the target language, aiming to convey a paraphrased version of its meaning. In phonemic translation, the translator focuses primarily on preserving the auditory quality of the source, sometimes at the expense of clarity or coherence. As Lefevere observes, while this method may be somewhat effective for rendering onomatopoeic expressions, it generally results in awkward and frequently nonsensical translations (Lefevere, 1975, p. 49).
- 2- **Literal translation:** This strategy relies on a word-for-word rendering of the source text, often disrupting both its meaning and grammatical structure. Lefevere (1975, p. 49) argues that due to the lack of exact equivalents between languages, this method proves artistically ineffective and ultimately impractical in literary contexts.
- 3- **Metrical translation:** It focuses on replicating the original poem's metre in the target language, prioritizing rhythmic structure over other textual features. This approach emphasizes a single formal element while neglecting the overall integrity of the poem, often resulting in distorted meaning and disrupted syntax (Lefevere, 1975, p. 61; Bassnett, 2014, p. 93).
- 4- **Poetry to Prose:** This strategy renders the poem in prose form, focusing on conveying meaning rather than preserving poetic structure. This approach stands favorable in comparison to literal translation, but it may still distort meaning, communicative value, and syntax (Lefevere, 1975, p. 42).
- 5- **Rhymed Translation:** Rhymed translation prioritizes replicating the original poem's rhyme scheme in the target language, often at the expense of meaning and other textual elements. For Lefevere this is where the translator is imprisoned to "a double bondage of metre and rhyme" as a result of which Lefevere finds caricature kind of translation as he shows in "Catullus" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 93). As with metrical translation, the focus on form leads to significant semantic loss. Rhymed translation differs from metrical translation in that the rhyme scheme is imposed by the translator, even if the original text lacks rhyme.
- 6- **Blank Verse Translation:** This strategy allows for greater accuracy and a higher degree of literalness, offering more flexibility than metrical or rhymed translation. It permits line expansion or compression, enjambment, shifts in word order, and continuation across lines. However, as Lefevere (1975, p. 69) points out, it still focuses on a single aspect, typically form, at the expense of meaning and other elements of the original.

7- Interpretation: Lefevere further divides this strategy into two as **version** and **imitation**.

- a. **Version:** Version translation retains the source content but alters the form, using paraphrase, colloquialisms, and added imagery to convey the original's effect. This often compromises the structure and texture of the original.
- b. **Imitation:** Imitation involves creating a new poem inspired by the source, sharing little beyond the title or theme. It reflects the translator's personal aesthetic rather than aiming for fidelity.

As Bassnett (2014, p. 93) notes, these translation strategies often fall short because "the deficiencies of the methods he examines are due to an overemphasis of one or more elements of the poem at the expense of the whole." Although Lefevere proposed seven distinct strategies to outline possible approaches to poetry translation, he does not endorse them all as equally effective. In fact, he explicitly critiques some, particularly phonemic and literal translation, for their inability to preserve the poetic function of the original. In this study, the strategies are not treated as ideal models for poetic translation but are instead used as a diagnostic framework to assess the translation and generative capabilities of ChatGPT. By instructing the AI to translate according to each strategy, the study aims to reveal the model's interpretive tendencies, its responsiveness to different translational approaches, and the limits of its competence. Accordingly, Lefevere's framework serves a methodological rather than a prescriptive function.

5. SYLVIA PLATH AND THE POEM "CHILD"

The selected corpus of the study is Sylvia Plath's poem "Child". Once regarded as a minor but gifted poet overshadowed by her husband Ted Hughes, Plath's work was long interpreted through themes of darkness and death, often in connection with her suicide. As Bassnett (2005, p. 1) highlights, feminist criticism later reframed her poetry as a powerful expression of "rage and outrage," reflecting the tension between individual identity and social expectations placed on women. While some have viewed her as a fragile figure preoccupied with death, others see her as an archetypal Everywoman confronting unattainable ideals of femininity. Plath is frequently described as a "difficult" poet due to her distinctive symbolism and complex personal mythology. Though autobiographical elements are present, both Plath and Hughes emphasized that her poetry was not mere self-expression but rather the result of deliberate, crafted transformation. Her work reflects a deep search for identity and ongoing experimentation with poetic form (ibid, p. 2).

"Child" is among the last poems Plath wrote, presumably addressed to her child, shortly before her death. The poem begins with a tone of tenderness and idealized hope, expressing a desire to fill the child's gaze with beauty and innocence. This initial warmth is sharply disrupted in the final stanza, where stark imagery and emotional dissonance replace earlier affection. Through a jarring shift in tone and the deliberate use of juxtaposition, the poem ultimately evokes an unsettling vision of inner turmoil.

"Child"

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,

The zoo of the new
 Whose name you meditate
 April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
 Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
 Pool in which images
 Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
 Wringing of hands, this dark
 Ceiling without a star.

The poem was selected for its layered meanings and its balance of form and structure. Its thematic richness and brevity make it especially suitable for a focused and practical application of Lefevere's seven translation strategies. Against this theoretical and methodological backdrop, the following section analyzes how ChatGPT-4o recreates "Child" according to each of Lefevere's strategies.

6. EVALUATING AI OUTPUTS

This section analyzes how ChatGPT responds to prompts aligned with André Lefevere's seven strategies for poetry translation. Each Turkish translation of Sylvia Plath's "Child" was generated using a prompt designed to correspond to one of these strategies, enabling a comparative evaluation of how the model navigates meaning, form, and poetic effect under different translational priorities.

Prior to the strategy-based translations, a preliminary test was conducted to assess ChatGPT's baseline knowledge of Lefevere's 1975 framework. The question "Do you know the seven strategies suggested by Lefevere in 1975 about poetry translation?" was posed to the model. While the response demonstrated a general familiarity with the concept, it failed to distinguish the two subcategories within the seventh strategy; version and imitation, treating them as a single, unified approach. To avoid conceptual ambiguity during analysis, the study provided ChatGPT with explicit definitions of each strategy, directly based on Lefevere's original categorization. Once the framework was clarified, strategy-specific prompts were applied. All prompts were issued in English and followed a fixed structure directly referencing Lefevere's terminology: "Please translate the poem "Child" by Sylvia Plath into Turkish using the [...] translation strategy proposed by Lefevere in 1975." No additional paraphrasing or explanatory context was provided. Each resulting translation was then examined to evaluate the model's responsiveness to the stylistic, structural, and interpretive demands embedded within each method. The translations were generated using the web-based version of ChatGPT-4o via the OpenAI platform in March 2025. Default system settings were used (temperature: 1.0; max token length: auto-managed by the interface). No custom fine-tuning or regeneration was applied. This ensured that the model's first response to each prompt could be assessed as-is, preserving its immediate interpretive tendencies.

Phonemic Translation
<p>Yor klir ay iz dı van ebsilutli b'yutıfıl thing. Ay vant tū fil it wit kalar end daks, Dı zu ov dı nū Huz neymz yu medıtayt— Eypırıl snoudrop, İndiyn payp, Lidıl Stolk witaut renkıl, Puul in huç imıcız Şud bi grend end klasikıl Nat dis trabl's Ringing ov hendz, dis dark Sil'ing witaut a star (ChatGPT-4o, 2025)</p>

The output produced by ChatGPT-4o demonstrates a misapplication of phonemic translation by transcribing the original English sounds using Turkish orthography. According to Lefevere's definition, this strategy aims to replicate the source text's sound, even at the cost of meaning. However, the system appears to focus exclusively on this auditory dimension, neglecting its function as a translation strategy within a poetic context. As a result, what emerges is not a translation in the traditional sense but a form of phonetic mimicry that lacks semantic coherence. While such an approach might have merit when applied to onomatopoeic passages, in this case, the outcome reads as an awkward, artificial construction that does not fulfill the strategic objective of phonemic translation as a cross-linguistic poetic rendering.

ChatGPT rationalizes this output by emphasizing its deliberate use of Turkish spellings to imitate English phonemes, seeking to evoke a "melodic echo." It does preserve the original line structure, which helps maintain a degree of auditory rhythm. However, this prioritization of sound over meaning and interpretive depth calls into question its validity as a translation. Although Lefevere's phonemic translation allows for the sacrifice of meaning to preserve sound, it still assumes a creative interplay between form and interpretive resonance. In this case, however, it could be argued that the strategy is applied mechanically: ChatGPT renders the text through transliteration without producing an actual act of translation. In parallel with this interpretation, 6 out of 10 interviewers find this output as failed the prompt response. This also shows a fundamental gap in AI's prompt responsiveness. Although the model created a text in response to the prompt, the result lacks the detail expected from a phonemic approach.

The second strategy in Lefevere's typology is literal translation, to which ChatGPT-4o responds as follows:

Literal Translation

Senin berrak gözün
 tamamen güzel olan tek şey.
 Onu renk ve ördeklerle doldurmak istiyorum,
 yeni olanın hayvanat bahçesi,
 adını düşündüğün —
 Nisan kardeleni, Hint borusu,
 küçük

 kırıksız bir sap,
 içinde imgelerin olması gereken
 büyük ve klasik bir havuz —

 böyle bir
 ellerin burkulması değil, bu karanlık
 yıldızsız bir tavan (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

The output produced by ChatGPT-4o under the literal translation strategy illustrates moderate to high level application of prompt responsiveness by providing word-for-word substitution, one of the most restrictive approaches in Lefevere's typology. This method prioritizes word-level fidelity by replacing source words with their closest equivalents in the target language, often neglecting poetic form, metaphorical meaning, and syntactic flow. The system operates primarily at the lexical level, aiming for dictionary-based accuracy rather than interpretive nuance. Therefore, creativity or literary value at this strategy are not features that could be expected. Under these circumstances, the result as a translation that disrupts both semantic integrity and aesthetic cohesion is not unexpected. For instance, while "Ceiling without a star" becomes "Yıldızsız bir tavan," the metaphorical weight of the image is flattened, losing its emotional resonance. Similarly, the phrase "içinde imgelerin olması gereken" disrupts the Turkish grammar. A notable semantic distortion also occurs in the second stanza, where the features "grand and classical" are incorrectly attributed to the pool rather than to the images it contains. Still, disruptions in meaning and grammar are expected in this strategy as the prompt requires word for word equivalences. 6 out of 10 interviewers find this output answers to the prompt in high level competency.

Yet it should also be noted that lexical fidelity is not consistent in the output. For instance, the word "troubled" is omitted entirely in the translation, which poses a lack in responding to the prompt. These inconsistencies suggest a moderate to high level engagement with the strategy and reflect the model's both competency and limitations in maintaining literal coherence.

Metrical Translation

Senin berrak gözün
 Tek gerçek güzellik.
 Renkler, ördekler dolsun

Yeni bir hayvanat,
 Adını düşündüğün—
 Nisan kardeleni,
 Hint borusu küçük,

 Kırıksız bir sap,
 İmgelerin olduğu
 Büyük ve klasik bir
 Havuz olmalıydı—

 Değil bu sıkıntılar,
 Burkulan eller, karanlık
 Yıldızsız tavan gibi (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

Metrical translation prioritizes the rhythmic structure of the source text, aiming to recreate syllabic balance, line breaks, and pause patterns in the target language. Since the original poem is written in free verse, this strategy calls for a flexible yet rhythmically coherent translation, rather than strict metrical replication.

In the AI-generated output prompted specifically for metrical fidelity, significant disruptions to rhythm and form can be observed. The opening line “Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing” is split into two lines “Senin berrak gözün” and “Tek gerçek güzellik” which alters the flow and breaks the unity of the original line. While this division may have been intended to approximate a balanced rhythm, it ultimately distorts the intended cadence. Another notable issue concerns the translation of the standalone word “Little.” In the source text, this single-word line introduces a pause and tonal fracture, deliberately disrupting the rhythm. In the Turkish translation, however, it is incorporated into the preceding line, diluting both its formal and semantic impact. This change also shifts its referent, incorrectly attaching it to “Hint borusu” (Indian pipe), thereby distorting the original image. Additionally, the line “the zoo of the new”, notable for its monosyllabic construction and dense imagery, is rendered with a more general and less rhythmically evocative phrase, “yeni bir hayvanat,” weakening the original metrical effect.

Although the translation demonstrates some effort to maintain a literary tone, these formal inconsistencies undermine the strategy’s main aim. As metrical translation allows for some semantic compromise in favor of rhythmic preservation, shifts in meaning (e.g., “hayvanat,” “küçük Hint borusu”) could be tolerated. However, the failure to replicate pause patterns and syllabic structure indicates that ChatGPT’s performance under this strategy remains at a surface level, with notable structural flaws. The majority of the interviewers in this sense find the output either surface level (4/10) or failed (3/10) in prompt responsiveness, primarily due to its inability to maintain syllable count and verse alignment.

Senin berrak gözün, mutlak biçimde güzel olan tek şey. Onu renklerle ve ördeklerle doldurmak istiyorum; yeniliğin bir tür hayvanat bahçesiyle. Bu yeni şeylerin adlarını düşünüyorsun: Nisan kardeleni, Hint borusu... Küçük, kırıksız bir sap gibi. İmgelerin içinde yer alabileceği bir havuz olmalı bu göz; görkemli ve klasik bir havuz. Oysa elimizde olan, bu endişeyle kıvranan eller ve yıldızsız, karanlık bir tavan (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

In this output, ChatGPT demonstrates a moderate to high application of Lefevere's poetry-to-prose strategy. The poem's lineation is removed, and the content is recreated in continuous prose, as expected within this approach. While the communicative intent of the source is partially retained, the resulting text lacks literary texture and emotional depth.

Although poetry-to-prose translation is not bound by formal constraints such as rhyme or metre, it still requires stylistic precision in preserving metaphor, imagery, rhythm, and tone. In this version, expressions such as "mutlak biçimde güzel olan tek şey" and "bu yeni şeylerin adlarını düşünüyorsun" reflect a literal, almost explanatory tone. These renderings reduce the suggestive ambiguity of the source and flatten its poetic density.

Moreover, the prose lacks narrative cohesion. Instead of forming a fluid, interpretive retelling, the text reads as a series of loosely connected sentences. This disjointed structure weakens the emotional progression of the poem and limits the transformative potential of the strategy.

Yet, given that this strategy places more emphasis on conveying meaning rather than preserving poetic style, the output may be interpreted as falling within a mid-to-high range of success. Indeed, interview responses reflect this evaluation: 3 out of 10 experts rated the output as moderate, while 4 assigned it a high score. Several participants also noted that the prose version could be improved through follow-up prompts that refine imagery or narrative cohesion. This suggests that while the initial translation may lack aesthetic richness, it demonstrates structural responsiveness to the strategy and holds potential for refinement through targeted prompt iteration.

Rhymed Translation

Berrak gözlerin ışığın,
 Tek saf, en güzel varlığın.
 Renklerle, ördekle dolsun,
 Yeni bir dünya kurulsun.

Adını fısıldar rüya,
 Nisan kardeleni, dünya,
 Hint borusu, ince bir dal,
 Çiziksiz bir sap, saf bir hal.

İmge havuzu olsun o göz,
 Büyük ve klasik bir süs,
 Olmasın gamlı ellerin,

Karanlık tavanın kederin,
Yıldızsız, ışıksız bir gece (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

In this instance, ChatGPT demonstrates a strong alignment with Lefevere's rhymed translation strategy, prioritizing sound patterning and euphony over semantic fidelity. In the definition of this strategy, it is crucial to remind that "the rhyme scheme is imposed by the translator, even if the original text lacks rhyme." The Turkish output exhibits a consistent end-rhyme scheme (e.g., ışıgın-varlığın, dolsun-kurulsun, rüya-dünya, dal-hal), even though the original poem by Sylvia Plath is written in free verse with minimal rhyme. This shows that the model interprets the prompt as an instruction to reshape content in favor of formal structure, actively generating rhymes to fulfill the stylistic expectation. In terms of prompt responsiveness experts also believe that the AI output demonstrates moderate level (4) to high level (4) competence.

The translation also includes several creative interventions. For example, "the zoo of the new" becomes "yeni bir dünya", a substitution guided by phonetic compatibility rather than semantic equivalence. Similarly, the line "the names you meditate" is reimagined as "rüya" (a dream), shifting from concrete referents to a more metaphorical register for the sake of creating rhyme. These lexical transformations indicate that the model sacrifices precision to maintain rhyme, in keeping with the rationale of this strategy.

Although rhymed translation is often criticized for imposing a "double bondage of metre and rhyme" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 93), this example demonstrates ChatGPT's ability to navigate such constraints by constructing a poetic register that, while distinct from the source, remains coherent and aesthetically pleasing. The vocabulary choices ("imge," "keder," "kardelen") and rhythmic flow reflect an effort to elevate the tone of the translation. While some structural elements like enjambment are lost or compressed, the overall result retains musicality and stylistic unity. Ultimately, the model delivers a text that fulfills the prompt, suggesting a high degree of responsiveness and literary competence within the framework of rhymed translation.

Blank Verse Translation

Senin berrak gözün,
tek ve mutlak güzelliğin.
İçini renklerle, ördeklerle doldurmak isterim,
yeni doğmuş dünyanın hayvanat bahçesiyle.
Adını düşündüğün
Nisan kardeleni, Hint borusu,
kırıksız bir sap, küçük bir beden.

İmgelerin dolup taşıdığı
büyük ve klasik bir havuz olmalıydı,
ellerin sıkıntıyla büküldüğü

ve yıldızsız bir tavanın altında
karanlık çökmemeliydi (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

Compared to other strategies, blank verse translation offers greater flexibility by forgoing strict metre and rhyme. This allows for a focus on preserving semantic accuracy while maintaining a poetic tone. In this example, ChatGPT demonstrates a moderate-level application of the strategy. Rather than prioritizing formal constraints, the model attempts to render the source meaning using stylistically elevated poetic language. This approach is particularly effective in the poem's final lines. While previous strategies that imposed metre or rhythm often led to unnatural or fragmented expressions, here the translation maintains clarity and emotional coherence. The rendering of "ellerin sıkıntıyla büküldüğü / ve yıldızsız bir tavanın altında / karanlık çökmemeliydi" conveys the emotional weight of Plath's closing image and recreates the poem's shift into despair.

Nevertheless, certain elements fall short of the aesthetic potential offered by this strategy. For instance, "Hint borusu" is a direct translation of "Indian pipe", but it lacks the poetic resonance of alternatives like "beyaz peri çiçeği", which would better reflect the source's symbolic and tonal intent. Additionally, there is a substantial semantic shift in the output: in the source poem, the adjectives "grand and classical" define the images themselves, whereas in the translation they describe the pool, changing the source meaning.

Despite these limitations, the output still exhibits compensatory features. Although the poem is condensed into two stanzas, the structural contrast, between the nature-infused optimism of the first and the existential darkness of the second, effectively mirrors the tonal arc of the original. The overall tone remains dignified and restrained, in line with the stylistic expectations of blank verse. Accordingly, one expert rated the output as demonstrating high competence, five as moderate, and four as surface-level in its execution of the strategy.

Version
<p>Senin gözlerin bir armağan: Tertemiz, berrak, Kendi rengini arayan boş bir sayfa gibi. Onu kuş sesleriyle, parlak renklerle doldurmak isterim— yeni bir dünyanın bahçesi, henüz adını koyamadığın bir dünya.</p> <p>Bembeyaz bir kardelen, narin bir boru çiçeği gibi, gözlerinde kırıksız bir umut yeşeriyor.</p> <p>O gözlerde yalnızca büyük düşler ve asil imgeler doğmalıydı, karanlıkta kaybolan</p>

çarpınan eller değil,
yıldızsız gecelerin ağırlığı değil (ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

In line with Lefevere's concept of version translation, this output represents a high-level attempt to preserve the poem's emotional core while reconfiguring its linguistic and formal elements to align with Turkish poetic norms. Rather than producing a literal or structurally faithful version, the model embraces the semantic flexibility permitted by the strategy and prioritizes idiomatic and evocative expression. Lines such as "gözlerinde kırışksız bir umut yeşeriyor" ("an unwrinkled hope is blossoming in your eyes") exemplify interpretive reformulation, not directly present in the source, yet intended to convey equivalent emotional and metaphorical depth. Similarly, the final stanza, previously rendered in awkward or fragmented forms under more restrictive strategies, gains both clarity and poetic coherence in tone and meaning.

This response suggests that ChatGPT can effectively engage with the interpretive nature of version translation, restructuring content in a stylistically consistent, culturally resonant, and literarily competent manner. However, such creativity is necessarily bounded by the model's training data and its algorithmic patterning. While the output may appear aesthetically compelling, it remains the result of statistical approximation rather than autonomous poetic agency. Overall, the output demonstrates that ChatGPT is capable of responding to the version strategy with interpretive range, balancing fidelity and creativity through symbolic imagery and stylistic nuance. This method ranked among the highest in terms of prompt responsiveness with all participants evaluating it as demonstrating either moderate or high-level competence. The consensus among experts further reinforces the view that this output effectively fulfills the aims of version translation.

Imitation

Gözlerin bir kuyu,
içinde sabahların serin soluğu.
Boyasız bir tuval gibi duruyor,
dokunulmayı bekleyen.

Bütün renkleri,
yeni açmış bahar çiçeklerini,
gökyüzünde çarpınan kuşları
serpiştirmek isterim içine.

Oysa zaman,
ellerini kısıp karanlığı büyütüyor.
Ve bir gün,
gözlerinin üstüne çöken
yıldızsız bir geceyi
öğreneceksin ChatGPT-4o, 2025).

This strategy represents the most interpretive end of the translation spectrum, where the boundaries between translation and creative rewriting begin to dissolve. As Lefevere defines it, imitation favors aesthetic invention over fidelity, encouraging the creation of a new poem that is inspired by the source rather than reproducing it. In this output, ChatGPT demonstrates a high-level realization of the imitation strategy, producing a poetic composition that captures the emotional atmosphere and thematic essence of Plath's "Child", while substantially reimagining its form and imagery. The AI-generated poem preserves the central theme, the child's clear gaze and its confrontation with darkness, but rearticulates it through culturally resonant metaphors, such as "gözlerin bir kuyu" ("your eyes are a well"), replacing Plath's original image with an emotionally equivalent yet locally situated symbol. This transformation highlights the model's capacity to engage with poetic symbolism in a stylistically coherent manner. Notably, the output was rated as high-level by 7 out of 10 expert evaluators, with the remaining 3 assigning it a moderate rating. These results indicate that ChatGPT demonstrates its strongest performance in strategies that prioritize interpretive freedom and expressive reformulation.

Table 1 summarizes the comparative evaluation of AI-generated translations across Lefevere's seven strategies in terms of prompt responsiveness.

Lefevere's Strategies	Prompt Responsiveness
Phonemic Translation	Failed /Surface
Literal Translation	Moderate / High
Metrical Translation	Failed/Surfac
Poetry to Prose Translation	Moderate/High
Rhymed Translation	High
Blank Verse Translation	Surface/Moderate
a. Version	High
b. Imitation	High

Table 1: AI Prompt Capabilities according to Lefevere's Poetry Translation Strategies

As shown in Table 1, ChatGPT's outputs reveal a varied capacity to respond to Lefevere's seven translation strategies. The model consistently underperforms in strategies requiring close formal fidelity, particularly phonemic and metrical translation, where the inseparability of form and meaning, a defining feature of poetic discourse (Boase-Beier, 2013), is most acutely challenged. In these cases, ChatGPT's failure or minimal engagement reflects both the technological limitations of prompt-based systems and the persistent complexity of translating poetry's interwoven semiotic structures.

Conversely, when the task allows for greater interpretive flexibility, as in the version and imitation strategies, the model demonstrates higher degrees of creativity and literary coherence. These findings suggest that generative AI performs most effectively in translation contexts aligned with poststructuralist perspectives, where the translator (or, in this case, the AI) is viewed not as a

faithful reproducer of fixed meaning, but as a creative agent who reinterprets textual elements within new cultural and stylistic frameworks.

Among the strategies examined, version can be seen as the most liberal form of translation, still tethered to the source text but marked by significant formal and stylistic departures. Imitation, by contrast, operates beyond the boundaries of translation proper, generating a new poetic text that is inspired by, rather than derived from, the original. That ChatGPT performs most strongly under these two strategies suggests that its generative potential aligns more readily with tasks that reward interpretive freedom over structural fidelity. In this sense, the study does not only ask whether machines can translate like humans, but whether they can reimagine like human translators do.

CONCLUSION

Poetry translation remains a particularly complex task, as it requires negotiating meaning, form, sound, and emotion within an organic whole. Achieving balance in this context means avoiding reductive focus on isolated elements such as rhyme or literal meaning. Instead, it calls for a holistic engagement with the poem as a dynamic structure that integrates aesthetic form, semantic depth, and expressive voice. As Bassnett (2014, p. 94) notes, Lefevere's notion of version already implies a separation between form and substance, suggesting that translation and version occupy different conceptual planes. Yet, as Popovič (1970) argues, the translator may "differ organically, be independent," provided that such independence serves the purpose of recreating the source as a living text (cf. Bassnett, 2014, p. 94).

This study evaluates translations generated by ChatGPT-4o in response to prompts aligned with Lefevere's seven poetry translation strategies. The analysis offers insight not only into whether AI can follow targeted translational instructions, but also into the degree of creativity and literary value it can generate across differing interpretive conditions. The findings stress a central tension: while AI demonstrates notable competence in strategies that allow interpretive freedom, particularly version and imitation, it consistently struggles in tasks requiring close structural fidelity, such as phonemic and metrical translation. These results point to a functional but selective creativity, shaped by the algorithmic and pattern-based logic of the model rather than by an intuitive or holistic poetic sensibility.

This finding also brings us back to the central question of the study: Can machines translate like humans? These results invite a detailed reflection on the nature of creative translation, as it is observed that while AI demonstrates a high degree of creative potential when freed from structural constraints, it still struggles to sustain both stylistic and poetic equivalence simultaneously. The difficulty of recreating poetry in the target language, preserving both form and content, including poetic stance and creative expression, remains a challenge that current AI technologies have not yet overcome, whereas human translators may occasionally succeed in this task. In this regard, the model appears to be most effective when positioned as a co-creator working alongside human translators, rather than as an independent agent.

Ultimately, the study contributes to broader discussions about the capacity of AI in translation, as well as about the evolving nature of translation itself in a digitally mediated, prompt-driven era.

It suggests that while large language models can participate meaningfully in creative translation practices, their engagement remains bounded by structural limitations. What emerges is not simply an evaluation of AI's ability to translate poetry, but a reflection on how translation and the figure of the translator is being redefined in the age of generative computation.

AI Disclosure

This study utilized the ChatGPT-4o model developed by OpenAI to generate translations in alignment with Lefevere's seven poetry translation strategies. The model was accessed via its public web interface (March 2025 version) and was not customized or fine-tuned in any way. All outputs were generated using default system settings. The use of artificial intelligence in this research was conducted in accordance with academic integrity and ethical research principles.

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MURAT GÜR

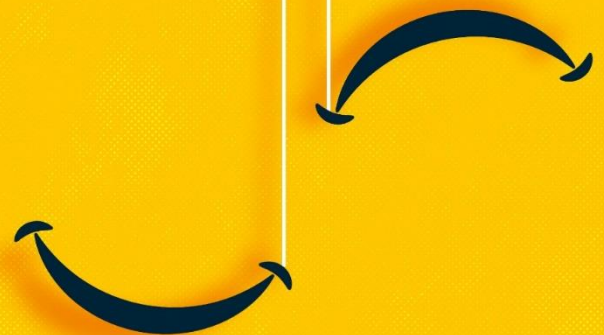


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