

AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE AND DISCOURSE LEVELS IN POETRY TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF ROBERT FROST'S *FIRE AND ICE*

Şiir Çevirisinde Anlatı ve Söylem Düzeylerinin Çözümlemesi: Robert Frost'un Fire and Ice Şiiri Örneği

Elif YILMAZ

Doktora Öğrencisi, Sakarya Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Çeviribilim Anabilim Dalı, Sakarya/Türkiye.
PhD Candidate, Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Translation
Studies, Sakarya/Türkiye.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6249-7072> | E-Posta: elif.caliskan6@ogr.sakarya.edu.tr

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Abstract

Poetry translation is a multilayered rewriting process shaped by the attempt to preserve rich symbolic structures, rhythmic elements, and sound patterns while maintaining semantic integrity. This study aims to comparatively analyse Robert Frost's poem *Fire and Ice* and its translation into Turkish created by Talât Sait Halman from an interdisciplinary perspective. Based on a qualitative research method, the study adopts Holmes's (1972) descriptive translation approach. The texts are analysed along the levels of narrative and discourse within the framework of Barthes' (1967) layers of meaning, Derrida's (1978) deconstruction theory, Kristeva's (1980) concept of intertextuality, and Lefevere's (1992) rewriting approach. The analysis reveals that Halman's translation largely preserves the narrative level of the source text, including the binary opposition constructed around the signs of fire and ice and the lyrical subject's choice between these two forces. However, significant transformations are observed at the discourse level. It is determined that the emphatic positions of the signs at the end of the lines are partially lost and that the lyrical subject's epistemic hesitation is largely eliminated in the translation, resulting in a more certain and dramatic discourse. The findings demonstrate that poetry translation is not a process of transferring meaning in a fixed manner, but rather a dynamic creative process that reconstructs meaning in accordance with the expressive possibilities of the target language. Since limited to a single source text and its translation, this study does not claim generalizability. Yet, it offers an interdisciplinary analytical model for poetry translation studies.

Keywords: Poetry translation, Rewriting, Deconstruction, Intertextuality

Öz

Şiir çevirisi, zengin sembolik yapıları, ritmik öğeleri ve ses uyumlarını koruma çabası ile anlam bütünlüğünü yitirmeme kaygısı arasında şekillenen çok katmanlı bir yeniden yazım sürecidir. Bu çalışma, Robert Frost'un *Fire and Ice* adlı şiirini ve Talât Sait Halman'ın Türkçe çevirisini disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşımla karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel araştırma yöntemine dayanan çalışmada Holmes'un (1972) betimleyici çeviri yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Metinler anlatı ve söylem düzeyleri ekseninde Barthes'in (1967) anlam katmanları, Derrida'nın (1978) yapısöküm kuramı, Kristeva'nın (1980) metinlerarasılık kavramı ve Lefevere'in (1992) yeniden yazım yaklaşımı çerçevesinde çözümlenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda Halman çevirisinin kaynak metnin anlatı düzeyini, ateş ve buz göstergeleri etrafında kurulan ikili karşıtlığını ve lirik öznenin taraf seçimini büyük ölçüde koruduğu tespit edilmiştir. Buna karşılık söylem düzeyinde belirgin dönüşümler yaşandığı görülmüştür. Göstergelerin dize sonundaki vurgu konumlarının kısmen yitirildiği ve lirik öznenin epistemik çekincesinin çeviride büyük ölçüde ortadan kalkarak daha kesin ve dramatik bir söyleme dönüştüğü belirlenmiştir. Bulgular, şiir çevirisinin anlamı sabit biçimde aktaran değil erek dilin söylem olanakları doğrultusunda yeniden kuran dinamik bir yaratıcı süreç olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Tek bir kaynak metin ve çevirisiyle sınırlı olan çalışma genellenebilirlik iddiası taşımamakla birlikte şiir çevirisi araştırmalarına disiplinlerarası bir çözümleme örneği sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiir çevirisi, Yeniden yazım, Yapısöküm, Metinlerarasılık

Introduction

According to the TDK (Turkish Language Association) dictionary, poetry is defined as "a form of literary expression created through rich symbols, rhythmic language, and harmonious sounds, which has a balanced structure and forms a complete whole by itself." Owing to these distinctive features, many translation scholars regard poetry as one of the most challenging literary genres to translate. Jakobson (1959), for example, argues that poetry is, by its very nature, untranslatable because its meaning is inseparable from its linguistic form. According to him, poetry can only be rendered through creative transposition rather than direct linguistic equivalence. Similarly, Barnstone (1993) describes poetry translation as a paradoxically impossible undertaking, arguing that every translation inevitably recreates rather than reproduces the poetic text. Paz (1992) likewise maintains that poetry resists translation because poetic words are not interchangeable as they are in ordinary language, each word occupies an irreplaceable position within the poem and contributes to its multiple layers of meaning.

Accordingly, it can be understood why scholars have devoted more attention to the challenges of poetry translation than to those of other literary genres (Bassnett, 2025). The literature shows that the challenges arise from the need to carry over symbolic meaning, rhythm, and sound patterns into the target language, while also keeping the overall meaning intact. In a way, poetry translation can be described as a multilayered creative process. The translator, as Aksoy (2002) suggests, acts as the poet of the translated work and goes through a creative rewriting experience similar to writing original poetry. However, it is debatable how much of the final poem belongs to the original author, the translator and the reader. As Barthes (1967) argues in *"The Death of the Author,"* once a literary text is created, it belongs to the reader, and its meaning is shaped through the reader's interpretation. When the translator enters this process, meaning is no longer produced between just the work and the reader. Instead, it is first shaped by what the translator understands from the original text and how they choose to express it in the target language and then further interpreted by the target reader.

If, as Barthes (1967) suggests, meaning is ultimately produced through the reader's interpretation, the translator can be regarded as the first reader of the source text and the first producer of meaning in the target language. From this perspective, Lefevere's (1992) concept of rewriting becomes particularly relevant. Lefevere argues that translation is not a mere linguistic transfer but a form of rewriting through which translators reconstruct texts according to cultural, ideological, and poetological constraints. In light of this, the translated poem should be understood not as a direct reproduction of the original but as a rewritten text that reflects the translator's interpretation while negotiating the expectations of the target literary system. Building on Lefevere's concept of rewriting, Hermans (1999) argues that a translation is not simply a copy of the source text. Rather, it is a new text shaped by the norms and

expectations of the target culture. Therefore, the translator's interpretive choices inevitably influence the translated text and contribute to the construction of meaning.

Consequently, drawing on Holmes' (1972) approach to Translation Studies, it may be more productive to examine poetry translation from a descriptive perspective rather than solely through debates on equivalence. Holmes argues that Translation Studies should not be limited to prescribing how translations ought to be produced but should also investigate how translations actually function in the target culture. In the case of poetry translation, such a descriptive analysis requires an interdisciplinary perspective capable of accounting for the multiple layers of meaning embedded in both the source and target texts.

In analyses of poetry translation and the meaning-making process for the target reader, such an interdisciplinary approach stands out as an important method. This is because it offers the opportunity to evaluate both the layers of meaning embedded in the source text and the target text that the translator deconstructs and reconstructs. This kind of approach serves as an effective and functional tool in Translation Studies, as it allows for the analysis of all sign systems involved in the text, whether linguistic or non-linguistic. It provides a strong theoretical framework for the functional analysis of symbols, images, and intertextual references in poetry translation.

Despite the growing recognition of interdisciplinary approaches in Translation Studies, previous research has primarily examined poetry translation in terms of equivalence, form, and stylistic features and relatively few studies have integrated narrative analysis, discourse analysis, rewriting theory, and intertextuality within a single analytical framework. Addressing this gap, the present study examines Robert Frost's poem *Fire and Ice* and its Turkish translation created by Talât Sait Halman through an interdisciplinary lens. A qualitative research method is employed, and Holmes's (1972) descriptive translation approach is adopted as the theoretical framework. The analysis looks at what key images such as fire and ice mean in both the original poem and its translation, how the narrative and overall message differ between the two texts, and how elements such as creative rewriting and intertextuality shape the translation process. Within this scope, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the analytical framework of the study:

1. How do the narrative and discourse levels function in *Fire and Ice* from an analytical perspective?
2. To what extent does Halman's translation preserve the layers of meaning at the narrative level of the source text?
3. To what extent does Halman's translation preserve the meaning and structure at the discourse level of the source text?

1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study approaches the multilayered nature of poetry translation through complementary theoretical perspectives. The poem and its translation, discussed under two subheadings in the relevant section, are examined at the narrative and discourse levels in order to show how these levels contribute to the production of meaning in the text. In addition, the ways in which these levels are reflected in the translation process are discussed within the relevant theoretical frameworks.

1.1. The Narrative Level in Poetry Translation

"Every signifier refers to other signifiers and never carries meaning on its own."
(Derrida, 1978, *paraphrased*)

A text can generally be said to consist of two levels: narrative and discourse. The narrative level refers to the structural whole formed by events, actions, characters, and their relationships in time and space (Rifat, 2021). As Hühn (2005) argues, poetry is not devoid of narrativity; rather, many poems exhibit narrative structures through the representation of events, speakers, characters, and temporal progression. He (2005) demonstrates that even brief poems can be structured around a decisive turn of state that makes them tellable.

In the translation process, the narrative level of the translated text is expected to largely correspond to that of the source text, unless external interventions such as censorship, ideological influences, cultural adaptations, or editorial changes occur. However, particularly in poetry translation, the narrative level may also shift due to the translator's interpretation. This is because emotional intensity, the positioning of the narrator, or word choices can all lead to shifts in meaning at this level. Translators reconstruct not only lexical meaning but also the conceptual architecture which poetic ideas are organized.

In Translation Studies, this mentioned understanding has been developed by several influential approaches. Holmes (1972) and Lefevere (1992) present poetry translation as a process of reconstructing an integrated literary work rather than transferred discrete verbal meanings. A similar perspective was also put forward by Derrida. He argues that it is not possible to fully and completely preserve all layers of meaning from the source text in the translation process (Davis, 2009). However, this does not imply that meaning is simply lost. Rather, meaning is continuously reconstructed and reinterpreted in new linguistic and cultural contexts, allowing the translated text to generate new layers of meaning while maintaining a relationship with the source text. Consequently, a translated text is shaped not only by linguistic differences but also by the plurality and openness of meaning, which remains subject to continuous reinterpretation. In this regard, when the multiple layers of meaning that the source text carries within its own cultural and literary system are taken into account, it would not be accurate to describe the changes observed at the narrative level of the translated text as "inconsistencies." As noted in the introduction, the

meaning of a translated text emerges as a dynamic process shaped by the translator's perception as a target reader and by the active participation of the final target reader.

In addition to deconstruction, it is also worth discussing Derrida's concept of "iterability." According to Derrida (1978), every sign and text is repeated in different contexts, each time producing new meanings rather than simply reproducing the same one. This means that a text is never fixed or closed; every time it is read, translated, or interpreted, it takes on a slightly different form. In the context of translation, this concept suggests that the translated text is not merely a copy of the source text, but a new version that carries its own meaning potential. This capacity for repetition is also closely related to the target reader's process of reinterpreting the text in their own cultural and linguistic context (Davis, 2009).

In a similar way, intertextuality offers another approach to meaning by looking not only at what a text contains within itself, but also at the relationships it builds with other texts. Kristeva (1980) argues that a text gains meaning through the network of explicit or implicit connections it forms with other texts, and in doing so introduces the concept of intertextuality. According to her approach (1980), every text is like a mosaic that carries traces of previous texts, and meaning is continuously reproduced within this network of relationships.

In the translation process, the intertextual references carried by the source text may not always be transferred directly to the target system, and the translator may reposition these references within the intertextual context of the target culture. Both iterability and intertextuality show that the target text produced by the translator from the source text is further reproduced by the reader in line with their own cultural, cognitive, and affective competencies. In this way, meaning in the translation process is not static or fixed, but transforms into a plural structure that continuously opens and enriches itself (Derrida, 1978; Kristeva, 1980).

Expanding Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, Genette (1997) proposes the broader notion of transtextuality, which encompasses the various relationships that connect one text to another. These relationships include explicit references, allusions, quotations, and generic conventions that contribute to the construction of meaning. From this perspective, literary texts are understood not as isolated entities but as parts of a wider textual network. Consequently, the translation of poetry involves not only the transfer of linguistic meaning but also the reconstruction of these transtextual relationships within the target culture.

In the translation process, the intertextual and transtextual relationships carried by the source text cannot always be transferred directly into the target literary system. Alternatively, the translator may reconstruct, adapt, or reposition these relationships in accordance with the linguistic, cultural, and literary conventions of the target culture. Namely, the translated text establishes its own network of textual relationships while maintaining varying degrees of connection with the source text. This dynamic reconstruction of meaning becomes even more evident at the discourse

level, where ideological, stylistic, and cultural dimensions play a central role in shaping the translated text.

1.2. The Discourse Level in Poetry Translation

“The form of expression is part of the content.”

(Jakobson, 1960, paraphrased)

The discourse level of a text covers the choice of narrator, point of view, time arrangement, style, and linguistic preferences that determine how the narrative is presented. Unlike the narrative level, discourse focuses on the formal level formed by the combination of linguistic units (Rifat, 2021).

According to Fairclough (1989), texts should not be viewed as neutral representations of meaning. Rather, linguistic choices construct versions of reality by reflecting and reproducing ideological, cultural, and social perspectives. Similarly, Van Dijk (2008) maintains that discourse is mediated by the mental models of language users, meaning that linguistic production reflects the speaker's or writer's cognitive representations of reality. Therefore, meaning is neither purely textual nor purely social; rather, it emerges through the interaction between linguistic choices, textual structures, and the cognitive models that guide the production and interpretation of discourse. Both scholars (1989; 2008) reject the notion that discourse merely packages pre-existing meanings. In contrary, they argue that the discourse level itself is the locus at which meaning is constructed.

It is worth noting that this level has a particularly decisive role in poetry. This is because poetic meaning is not constructed through what is said alone but is rebuilt through the way it is said via rhetorical devices, rhyme scheme, rhythm, word choices, and similar preferences. In this respect, the discourse level in poetry has a significant influence on the transfer of meaning and forms one of its most creative layers. Every element at the discourse level of a poem functions as a sign. Sound repetitions and rhyme structures in particular go beyond being mere formal decorations. They evoke specific associations and emotional responses in the reader. Rather than conveying meaning through direct statement, poetry reorganizes it within a poetic discourse through images, metaphors, and symbolic language. In this way, the same event or emotion can be expressed in entirely different ways depending on the poet's stylistic choices. Similarly, the placement of lines on the page, the rhythmic structure, and the visual arrangement of a poem can all become part of the expression itself. The spatial organization of lines, the length of verses, or even the use of silence through punctuation and line breaks can shape the reader's experience of meaning at the discourse level. This shows that a poem is not simply a structure made up of words; the arrangement of lines and visual form also play an active role in constructing discourse.

In the translation process, the discourse level remains the most difficult layer to transfer. This is because, particularly in poetry translation, it is not enough to simply find equivalent words. The rhythm, sound patterns, imagery, and formal preferences that the source text constructs at the discourse level must also be reconsidered throughout the translation process. While the translator attempts to preserve this multilayered structure of the source text, they simultaneously create a new discourse order within the possibilities offered by the target language. Therefore, it is fair to say that poetry translation is not merely a transfer of meaning, but a creative process that involves the reconstruction of ways of expression and aesthetic structures.

As mentioned in the introductory discussion, Lefevere's (1992) concept of "rewriting" deserves further consideration in explaining the reconstruction of meaning at the discourse level. According to Lefevere (1992), translation is a process shaped by factors such as ideology, poetics, and the acceptance norms of the target system. In this framework, the translator does not simply transfer the source text word for word but rather reproduces it in a way that aligns with the expectations of the target reader and the literary norms of the target system. Lefevere (1992) argues that every act of rewriting whether translation, editing, anthologizing, or criticism involves a degree of manipulation, as the text is always reshaped according to the dominant values and conventions of the receiving culture. This means that the choices a translator makes at the discourse level are never purely linguistic; they are also cultural and ideological decisions. In this respect, changes observed at the discourse level should not be read as arbitrary deviations from the source text, but rather as conscious rewriting choices shaped by the conditions and expectations of the target system.

Paz (1992) makes a similar but more comprehensive argument than Lefevere (1992), maintaining that the sign and its expression are inseparable. In other words, he (1992) argues that altering the discourse of a poem inevitably changes its meaning. Building on this view, House (1997) operationalizes the relationship between discourse and meaning through a discourse-register model for translation quality assessment. From this perspective, the quality of a translation depends not only on semantic equivalence but also on the extent to which discourse features and register are preserved in the target text.

In summary, the discourse level in poetry translation goes far beyond a simple linguistic operation. It encompasses the reconstruction of rhythm, sound, imagery, and form within the constraints and possibilities of the target language and culture. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives discussed above from Derrida's (1978) iterability and Kristeva's (1980) intertextuality to Lefevere's (1992) rewriting it becomes clear that the translator's decisions at the discourse level are always shaped by a complex set of linguistic, cultural, and ideological factors. With this framework in mind, the analysis section moves on to analyse how these theoretical concepts manifest in the Turkish translation of Robert Frost's *Fire and Ice* by Talât Sait Halman.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using descriptive and comparative text analysis as the method for data collection and analysis. Within Holmes's (1972) framework, which classifies translation research as descriptive, theoretical, and applied, this study is positioned within the scope of descriptive translation studies.

The data set of the study consists of Robert Frost's (1942) poem *Fire and Ice* and its Turkish translation by Talât Sait Halman. The selection of this poem as the source text is based on several reasons. The poem has a short but dense structure of nine lines and offers a discourse texture that is well suited to comparative analysis. In addition, key images such as "fire" and "ice," which carry multiple layers of meaning at the narrative level, make the text structurally appropriate for interdisciplinary analysis. Halman's translation was chosen for three reasons: it has not previously been examined from a descriptive translation studies perspective. The translator holds a well-recognized position in the Turkish literary translation market; and the translation carries structural features at the discourse level that make it suitable for analysis in the context of poetry translation. The decision to limit the data set to these two texts is a conscious choice. Focusing on a single source text and its translation allows for a deeper and more multilayered analysis rather than a superficial one.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, both texts are presented in a line-by-line comparative table, making the differences visible. In the second stage, the narrative level of the poems is analysed within the framework of Barthes's (1967) layers of meaning and Derrida's (1978) deconstruction theory, followed by a discussion of the discourse level through sound patterns, rhyme scheme, visual arrangement, and other syntactic preferences, drawing on Derrida's (1978) concept of iterability, Kristeva's (1980) intertextuality, and Lefevere's (1992) rewriting framework.

Since the study is built on a single poem and its translation, the findings do not claim generalizability; rather, the aim is to offer a focused and in-depth textual analysis that demonstrates how poetry translation constitutes a multilayered space of meaning, one that is reproduced not only by the source poet but also by the translator.

Analysis

In this section, *Fire and Ice* and Halman's Turkish translation are comparatively analysed in terms of their narrative and discourse levels. The analysis begins with a comparative table, followed by a discussion of each level in turn.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of *Fire and Ice* and Halman's Translation

Source Text (Robert Frost)	Target Text (Talat Sait Halman)
FIRE AND ICE	ATEŞLE BUZ
Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice. From what I've tasted of desire I hold with those who favor fire. But if it had to perish twice, I think I know enough of hate To say that for destruction ice Is also great And would suffice.	Dünya ateşle sona erecek diyenler var, Buzla kimine göre. Tattım da biliyorum nedir hırslar, arzular; Benim yaşantım ateş diyenleri doğrular. Ama, yıkılacaksa bir değil, iki kere Ben, nefret ne demektir, bunu iyi bilirim Bütün amansız güçler buzda da vardır derim, Buz başlamaya görsün yıkıp öldürmelere.

The poem was written and published in 1920, immediately after the First World War. It explores the likelihood of two different apocalyptic scenarios represented through the elements named in its title. The speaking subject presents "fire" as the most probable force capable of bringing about the end of the world, framing it within an experiential context. "Ice," on the other hand, is positioned through an ironic tone as another possible means of destruction. Two key sources of influence are noted regarding the poem's composition (Parini, 2024). The first is Dante's *Inferno*, a 14th-century work depicting an allegorical journey through Hell. The second is a conversation Frost reportedly had with an astronomer about the possibility of the Sun ending through either fire or ice (Serio, 2010).

In this regard, the poem does not merely present a surface-level discussion of two possible apocalyptic scenarios. It also exhibits a multilayered structure that can be evaluated simultaneously at the levels of "literal meaning" and "total meaning,"¹ as distinguished by Perrine (1969). This multilayered structure points to a deeper intellectual framework concerning human nature and destruction, going well beyond the visible meaning constructed through a simple opposition. When evaluated within

¹ "Literal meaning" refers to the surface meaning of a poem the events, situations, and ideas that are directly stated. "Total meaning," on the other hand, refers to the deeper layer of meaning that emerges from a complete reading of the text; it is not explicitly stated but arises from the relationships among all the elements of the poem (Perrine, 1969).

Perrine's (1969) distinction between "literal meaning" and "total meaning," Halman's translation largely preserves the surface-level meaning of the poem and successfully transfers the central opposition structure of the source text into the target language. At the same time, the translation reproduces not only the directly expressed meanings but also the implicit and interpretively open dimensions of the poem, ensuring the continuity of total meaning in the target text.

The total meaning of the poem is not limited to its internal layers of meaning alone. It is also shaped within a network of intertextual relationships. In line with Kristeva's (1980) approach to intertextuality, the production of meaning in the poem takes on a plural structure through indirect references and cultural contexts established with other texts. In this regard, the references extending to Dante's *Inferno* a 14th-century allegorical journey through the nine circles of Hell, in which the worst sinners are frozen in ice in the lowest circle (Serio, 2010) reposition the poem's themes of apocalypse and destruction within a historical and literary background, deepening the total meaning of the poem. Although Halman's translation does not directly reproduce the intertextual background linked to Dante's *Inferno*, it preserves the total meaning of the poem centred on destruction and apocalypse. In doing so, it ensures that the layers of meaning evoked by this literary reference are indirectly sustained in the target text.

The total meaning here again is shaped within a network of intertextual relationships. However, this meaning does not remain fixed across different cultural contexts. It is instead open to reinterpretation. In the literary and cultural context that Frost addressed, references to Dante's *Inferno* create a more direct field of association. In the target culture of Türkiye, however, the same text can be reread; through different belief systems and cultural codes. This shows that intertextuality does not only concern the relationships between source texts. It also reveals that meaning in the translation process can transform depending on the cultural context in which it is received. Themes of apocalypse and destruction can therefore be reinterpreted through different cultural reference systems across different reader communities. Religious narratives of the end of the world are one such example and this makes plurality of meaning even more visible. When this process is considered within Barthes' (1967) framework of "*The Death of the Author*," the meaning of a text is no longer owned by a single authority. It transforms into a dynamic structure that is actively reconstructed by the reader. In this way, the translated text becomes not a fixed transfer of meaning, but it becomes an open space that is continuously reproduced through the interaction between the reader and their cultural context. This process aligns with Benjamin's (2000) view of translation as a means of sustaining the "afterlife" of a work and allowing it to continue its existence through different languages. It shows that translation is not a practice that brings a text to an end. Rather, it is a continuation that opens the text to new layers of meaning.

The connections that Frost's *Fire and Ice* establish with Dante's *Inferno* are not limited to the thematic level. They can also be read through a structural similarity. The

parallel between the poem's nine lines and the nine-layered structure of Hell in the *Inferno* shows that meaning in the source text is produced not only at the level of content but also through formal organization (Serio, 2010, p.218). In this regard, the line structure of the poem is interpreted as evoking the layered and downward-narrowing visual arrangement of Dante's depiction of Hell (see Figure 1). However, when Halman's translation is evaluated at the discourse level, this formal and visual structure is not preserved in the same way in the target text. From a deconstructive perspective, this can be understood as the dissolution and reinterpretation of the structural element that fixes meaning in the source text during the translation process. Therefore, rather than reproducing the structural integrity of the source text, the translation reconstructs it within the personal decisions of the translator and the discourse possibilities of the target language. This reveals that meaning has a transformable structure rather than a fixed form, as Derrida (1978) also points out in his work. This structural transformation can also be read through Derrida's (1978) concept of iterability. The structural form of the source text is not simply copied in the translation, but it is repeated in a new cultural and linguistic context, producing new layers of meaning in the process. In this sense, the translated text is not a failure to reproduce the original structure. It is a new iteration that carries its own meaning potential. Furthermore, the target reader's relationship with this structural dimension differs from that of the source reader. A Turkish reader is unlikely to approach the nine-line structure of the poem with an awareness of Dante's nine circles of Hell.



Figure 1. Botticelli's visualization of the nine-layered structure of Hell in *Mappa dell'Inferno* (Burgess, 2025)².

Another significant element to be addressed at the discourse level is the rhyme scheme. In the source poem, Frost shapes the rhyme scheme as ABAABCBCB, evoking Dante's tradition of terza rima (Khan & Sana, 2015, p.15).³ In the A rhyme group, the words "fire, desire, and fire" produce a flowing sound effect through their open and wide vowel structures. The B rhyme group, formed by "ice, twice, and suffice" creates a different auditory effect through a more closed sound pattern and the repetition of

² The source of the Figure 1: <https://www.thoughtco.com/dantes-9-circles-of-hell-741539>

³ Terza rima is an Italian verse form in which three-line stanzas are linked through interlocking rhymes (aba, bcb, cdc...). Used by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, this structure functions not only as a formal arrangement but also as a means of constructing the symbolic and cultural meaning of the work (Esen, 2025, p. 1842).

sounds like /s/. The C rhyme group, consisting of “*hate and great*”, forms a sharper and more striking rhythmic closure through their single-syllable and crisp sound structures. This supports the pattern of opposition running through the poem (Khan & Sana, 2015, p.15-16). This sound organization is not accidental. It reflects a conscious and consistent discourse preference. The association of fire and desire with open sounds, and ice and hate with narrow and sharp sounds, sustains the semantic contrasts of the text at the phonetic level as well (Serio, 2010, p.218).

In Halman's translation, the rhyme scheme takes the form ABAABCCB. When compared to the source poem, a notable divergence is visible particularly in the last three lines. Frost's BCB pattern becomes CCB in Halman's version. The A rhyme group, consisting of the words “*var* (exist-there are), *arzular* (desires), and *doğrular* (confirms)” stays relatively close to Frost's function through its open and wide /a/ sounds, except for the word repetition and syllable count in fire. The B rhyme group, formed by “*göre* (according to), *kere* (time), and *öldürmelere* (killing)” moves away from the closed and sharp phonetic structure that represents the hardness of ice in the source poem. It instead creates a softer and more flowing sound pattern through its rounded /e/ sounds. The C rhyme group, “*bilirim* (I know) and *derim* (I say)” carries a degree of tension through its narrow vowel structures. However, it does not fully reflect the sharp phonetic quality found in the source text.

When these discourse differences are evaluated through a deconstructive lens, it can be said that the formal centre of the source text is dissolved in the target text, resulting in a creative rewriting with a new discourse organization. The inability to fully reproduce terza rima within the possibilities of Turkish discourse has led to the intertextual reference to Dante being preserved only at the semantic level. At the phonetic level, this reference could not be made functional. At this point, an important question arises: are these differences the result of a conscious rewriting decision, or do they stem from the structural limitations of the Turkish language? It is not possible to give a definitive answer to this question. The transformation may reflect a deliberate stylistic preference, or it may simply be a consequence of what Turkish phonetics and poetic conventions allow. Either way, the outcome is the same. The target text establishes its own discourse order and refunctions the source poem's formal references within the norms of the target culture.

At this point, it is appropriate to move on to a comparative analysis through the binary and ternary line structures of the poems.

Frost:

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.

Halman:

Dünya ateşle sona erecek diyenler var,
Buzla kimine göre

The repetition of “*Some say... / Some say...*” in the first two lines of the source poem serves an important function at the discourse level. This repetition emphasizes an unspecified collective voice and creates the impression that multiple perspectives

exist. In this way, the theme of destruction moves beyond a personal narrative and enters a more general and universal space of discussion (Sharma, 2025, p.45). In Halman's translation, however, this repetitive structure is not fully preserved. The expression "*Diyenler var* (There are some who say)" appears only in the first line, while the second line uses "*kimine göre* (according to some)" opting for a more indirect form of expression. This may suggest that the emphasis on the repeated collective voice in the source text is somewhat weakened in the translation. It can also be said that the rhythmic effect of the repetition shifts into a softer and more ambiguous discourse.

At the semantic level, this shift seems to work in two directions. The phrase "*diyenler var* (there are some who say)" gives the view a more visible and common quality in Turkish. This differs from the neutral tone of "say" in English. The phrase "*kimine göre* (according to some)" however, brings relativity and uncertainty to the foreground. This may reduce the equal weight that the source text gives to both views. Yet, at the narrative level, the core content of the first two lines appears to be largely preserved. The idea that the world will end in fire or ice is still present in the target text.

Frost:

From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.

Halman:

Tattım da biliyorum nedir hırslar, arzular;
Benim yaşıntım ateş diyenleri doğrular

The third and fourth lines of the source poem form a single syntactically connected sentence. The third line presents the reason while the fourth presents the conclusion. The syntactic link between the two conveys the lyric subject's movement from experience to judgment without interruption (Sharma, 2025, p.49). In Halman's translation; however, these two lines are separated by a semicolon and become two syntactically independent sentences. This breaks the reason-to-conclusion flow found in the source text. As a result, the continuity of the lyric subject's movement of thought appears to be weakened at the discourse level.

When the positioning of signs within the line is considered, the sign "*desire*" can be said to be preserved at the end of the line in Halman's translation as "*arzular* (desire)". The sign "*fire*" however, appears at the end of the fourth line in the source poem, which is the point of emphasis. In Halman's translation, "*ateş* (fire)" is moved to the middle of the line and its discursive weight appears to be weakened compared to the source. In addition to these observations, a meaning addition in the fourth line that does not exist in the source text also draws attention. Frost's expression "*I hold with those who favor fire*" positions the lyric subject as someone who joins a collective group with a distant and intellectual stance. At this point, an intertextual reading adds another layer to this preference. Within the Aristotelian and Dantean tradition, sins are divided into two categories: sins of passion and sins of reason. According to both Aristotle and Dante, sins of passion are considered less severe than sins of reason. This is because human beings are, above all, thinking creatures. Acting out of passion is therefore seen as more forgivable than acting out of cold and calculated reasoning. In

this framework, fire represents passion and desire, while ice represents hatred and reason used for destructive purposes. The lyric subject's alignment with fire can thus be read not simply as a personal preference but as a moral positioning within this philosophical tradition (Serio, 2010, p.218). Halman's addition of personal experience through "*benim yaşıantım* (my life)" shifts this philosophical stance toward a more subjective and individual expression. In doing so, the intertextual depth embedded in the source text's moral framework may be partially lost in the target text. However, even if this intertextual layer is preserved in the translation, it may still be interpreted differently in the Turkish context. The philosophical and religious background of the source culture is not the same as that of the target culture. A Turkish reader approaching the text through a different ethical and religious tradition may construct an entirely different meaning from the fire and ice opposition. This suggests that intertextual depth is not only a matter of what the translator preserves or loses. It is also shaped by what the target reader brings to the text from their own cultural background.

Frost:

But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate

Halman:

Ama, yıkılacaksa bir değil, iki kere
Ben, nefret ne demektir, bunu iyi bilirim

In the fifth and sixth lines, the first notable element at the discourse level is Halman's addition of commas that do not exist in the source poem. The commas after "*Ama* (But)," and "*Ben* (I)," are not present in the source text. However, they are applied consistently and can be considered a stylistic preference specific to the target text. In terms of sign positioning, "*twice*" appears at the end of the line in the source poem, occupying a strong point of emphasis. Halman expands this sign as "*bir değil, iki kere* (not once but twice)" and places it at the end of the line as well. This choice preserves the numerical emphasis. However, it also expands the plain and economical discourse of the source poem and adds an explanatory layer of meaning to the target text. The sign "*hate*" on the other hand, is positioned at the end of the line in the source poem and draws its discursive weight from this point of emphasis. In Halman's translation, "*nefret* (hate)" is moved to a position closer to the beginning of the line and this discursive weight appears to be weakened.

At the semantic level, the most notable transformation can be observed in the expression "*I think I know enough of hate*." In the source poem, the word "*think*" functions as an epistemic hedge. The lyric subject says they think they know enough of hate but does not claim certainty. This suggests a limited and measured positioning (Khan & Sana, 2015, p.15). Halman's expression "*nefret ne demektir, bunu iyi bilirim* (I know well what hate is)," however, drops the word "*think*" entirely, which may remove this epistemic hedge. The addition of "*iyi bilirim* (I know well)" also introduces a sense of certainty and experiential emphasis that does not exist in the source text. When considered within Lefevere's (1992) rewriting framework, this transformation

can be read as a possible reflection of the translator's tendency to position the lyric subject more clearly and assertively for the target reader.

Frost:

To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Halman:

Bütün amansız güçler buzda da vardır derim,
Buz başlamaya görsün yıkıp öldürmelere

The most visible transformations at the discourse level appear in the last three lines. In terms of sign positioning, the signs "*ice*" and "*suffice*" occupy strong points of emphasis at the end of their lines in the source poem. The word "*buzda* (in ice)" is embedded in the middle of the line, and its discursive weight seems to be weakened. This is consistent with the pattern observed in earlier lines, where key signs are removed from line-final positions. This may suggest that Halman's translation systematically reorganizes the emphasis hierarchy found in the source poem.

At the semantic level, the translation of "*To say*" as "*derim* (I say)" is worth noting. In the source poem, "*To say*" functions as an objective and distanced verb of expression. In Turkish, however, "*derim* (I say)" carries a much more personal and assertive tone. This choice appears to continue the pattern of epistemic shift observed in the fifth and sixth lines, where the word "*think*" was dropped. It may also reinforce the idea that the lyric subject in Halman's translation is positioned as a more certain and decisive voice compared to the source poem.

The most striking transformation appears in the final line. In the source poem, "*Is also great / And would suffice*" is remarkably plain, measured, and ironic. The word "*suffice*" presents the destruction of ice as merely enough, while preserving the lyric subject's calm and distant tone. This irony represents one of the most powerful discourse moments in the poem (Thompson, 1961, p.122). Halman's expression "*Buz başlamaya görsün yıkıp öldürmelere* (Once/If ice begins to destroy and kill)," however, appears to transform this irony and cool distance entirely. A far more dramatic and emotionally charged image of destruction is constructed. In this way, the measured discourse of the source poem gives way to a more explicit and forceful narrative. This transformation in the final line is not an isolated shift. It can be seen as the culmination of a pattern observed throughout the poem. From the weakening of the collective voice in the opening lines to the removal of epistemic hedges in the middle stanza, Halman's translation consistently moves toward a more personal, certain, and emotionally direct discourse. The final line brings this tendency to its most visible point.

When the narrative and discourse levels are considered together, a general pattern becomes visible in Halman's translation. At the narrative level, the core content of the poem is largely preserved. The central opposition between fire and ice and the theme of destruction carry over into the target text without significant loss. At the discourse level; however, a consistent tendency toward transformation can be observed. Key signs lose their line-final positions of emphasis. Epistemic hedges are

removed. The lyric subject is repositioned as a more personal and assertive voice. The irony and measured tone of the source poem give way to a more dramatic and emotionally direct expression. These two levels; therefore, tell different stories about the translation. The narrative remains recognizable, but the discourse is rewritten.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the translation preserves the narrative structure of *Fire and Ice* to a considerable extent while producing more substantial transformations at the discourse level. At the narrative level, the central opposition between *fire* and *ice*, together with the poem's apocalyptic framework, remains largely intact in the Turkish translation. This supports Hühn's (2005) view that narrative in poetry is primarily organized through events, states, and their progression, all of which can be generally maintained even when linguistic expression changes. It should be noted; however, that this preservation refers to the poem's overall meaning rather than to its intertextual and transtextual meanings.

From a broader perspective, these findings resonate with Genette's (1997) concept of transtextuality and Derrida's (1978) notion of iterability. Rather than simply reproducing a text in another language, translation relocates it within a new linguistic and cultural context, where it enters different textual networks and becomes open to new interpretations. In this sense, the translated text does not merely preserve the narrative of the source text but also extends its interpretive potential by generating new meanings within the target culture. Once incorporated into the Turkish literary system, Halman's translation continues its existence within a different cultural horizon, where it encounters the target readers' own literary memory, cultural experiences, and networks of texts. In Barthes' (1967) sense, meaning is therefore no longer determined solely by the source text or by the translator but is continuously reconstructed through the interaction between the translated poem and its readers. Consequently, the translated poem does not simply carry the narrative of the original into another language; it acquires an afterlife in which its meaning remains open to reinterpretation as it is read within new cultural and textual contexts.

The analysis likewise aligns with Paz's (1992) argument that poetic meaning cannot be separated from its form of expression. Throughout the analysis, changes in discourse are accompanied by some changes in meaning. The replacement of the hesitant with the more assertive one, as well as the transformation of the restrained ending into the more dramatic translation, illustrates how modifications in discourse inevitably reshape the interpretation of the poem. In this respect, the translation confirms Paz's claim that altering poetic discourse also alters poetic meaning nuances.

The findings are also consistent with Fairclough's (1989) and Van Dijk's (2008) perspectives. The discourse-level transformations observed in the translation demonstrate that changes in linguistic choices extend beyond formal variation and contribute to the construction of new meanings. Although the overall narrative

remains relatively stable, the shifts in tone, emphasis, and epistemic stance reshape the representation of the poetic voice and expand the range of interpretations available to the target reader.

The analysis suggests that discourse in poetry translation functions not merely as a means of expressing meaning but as a space in which meaning is continuously reconstructed within the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive context of the target language. In this sense, Halman's translation represents one possible discourse rather than the inevitable discourse of the poem in Turkish. Indeed, another translator operating within the same language and cultural context might produce a substantially different poetic discourse by making different choices of rhythm, emphasis, imagery, or tone.

The analysis therefore highlights that discourse in poetry translation is shaped not solely by linguistic or cultural constraints but also by the translator's individual cognitive processing and interpretive decisions, through which meaning is continuously reconstructed. Consequently, the translated poem should be understood not as a fixed reproduction of the source text but as a rewriting in Lefevere's (1992) sense and a reconstruction in Derrida's (1978) sense, continuously reshaped through the translator's linguistic, cultural, and interpretive choices.

Conclusion

This study has comparatively examined Robert Frost's *Fire and Ice* and its Turkish translation by Talât Sait Halman in terms of their narrative and discourse levels, analysing them within an interdisciplinary framework drawing on deconstructive and intertextual perspectives.

The analysis provides answers to the research questions posed in this study. First, regarding the question of how meaning is constructed at the narrative and discourse levels in *Fire and Ice*, the findings show that the narrative level of *Fire and Ice* is organized around a binary opposition between fire and ice. These signs carry meaning at both the literal and connotative levels, connecting individual human emotions to a universal theme of destruction. The discourse level operates through formal choices such as rhyme scheme, sound patterns, and the epistemically hedged voice of the lyric subject. These two levels do not function independently. They mutually shape one another, and meaning is produced through their interaction.

Moreover, addressing the question of how the narrative level is transformed in Halman's Turkish translation, the findings reveal that the translation preserves the poem's overall narrative structure to a considerable extent while reconstructing its discourse. At the narrative level, Halman's translation largely carries over the core content of the source poem. The key signs, the apocalyptic scenario, and the lyric subject's alignment with fire are all present in the target text. However, discourse-level transformations also appear to affect the narrative to some degree. The removal of

epistemic hedges and the addition of personal experience emphasis subtly shift the positioning of the lyric subject.

In addition, as for the question of how discourse is transformed in translation, it can be said that the most significant transformations are observed. Sign positions shift, rhyme functions change, and the ironic and measured tone of the source poem gives way to a more dramatic and emotionally direct expression. These changes appear to reflect both the constraints of the target language and the translator's rewriting preferences within the norms of the target culture.

The analysis also suggests that the translated text restructures the source poem rather than reproducing it directly. When this transformation is considered through a deconstructive lens and within Lefevere's (1992) rewriting framework, translation emerges not as a fixed transfer of meaning but as a creative process of reconstruction shaped by the discourse possibilities of the target language and the expectations of the target reader. In this regard, Halman's consistent tendency to reposition the lyric subject as a more personal and assertive voice, to remove epistemic hedges, and to replace irony with a more dramatic expression can be read as a series of conscious or unconscious manipulations that reflect the translator's own poetic sensibility and interpretive choices. In this way, the translated text appears as a dynamic space of rewriting that both preserves and reorganizes meaning.

Since this study focuses on a single source text and a single translation, the findings do not claim generalizability. Studies examining different poems, different translators, or multiple translations comparatively may produce more comprehensive results regarding meaning and discourse transformation in poetry translation. In addition, the study's limitation to textual, linguistic, and discourse levels means that translator-centred data related to the production process such as the translator's own statements or documents concerning the translation process fall outside the scope of this work.

Nevertheless, this study offers an original analysis in the field of Turkish translation studies by examining Halman's translation of *Fire and Ice* through an interdisciplinary framework drawing on deconstructive and intertextual perspectives at the narrative and discourse levels. By bringing together Barthes' (1967) layers of meaning, Derrida's (1978) deconstructive approach, Kristeva's (1980) concept of intertextuality, and Lefevere's (1992) rewriting theory, this eclectic framework also proposes an interdisciplinary model of analysis that considers multiple theoretical perspectives together in poetry translation research.

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