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AI in Poetry Translation.
Ciaran Carson's "Dresden." A Case Study

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Abstract

The article sets out to explore the potential applications of AI in literary translation, poetry in particular. It intends to analyze the feedback provided by scholars who have already made use of AI in literary translation, though in an experimental way. It will also include a case study that will foreground Ciaran Carson's poem "Dresden," and will offer a platform for the critical analysis of the translation of the poem with the help of AI. The weak points of the AI translation will be singled out in conjunction with the ethical implications of using AI in translation, among which copyright and ownership, but also issues related to how texts are collected, stored, and reused.

Keywords: AI, literary translation, poetry, Neural Machine Translation, Phrase-Based Statistical Machine Translation, Machine Translation, ethical implications

In the current context in which AI is gaining more and more ground, an analysis of the ways in which it can be utilized in literary translation is not only timely but also extremely relevant. Such analyses have been increasingly made of late. Thus, in an article published in 2018, Antonio Toral and Andy Way addressed a very important question: "What Level of Quality Can Neural Machine Translation Attain on Literary Text?." The two scholars evaluated how well Neural Machine Translation (NMT) performs on literary

texts, novels in particular, a genre which is notoriously difficult for automatic translation. The article was based on a comparison between NMT and Phrase-Based Statistical Machine Translation (PBSMT), the previous dominant Machine Translation Technique. After investigating the translation into Catalan of twelve widely known English novels spanning from the 1920s to the present day, they concluded that NMT significantly outperforms PBSMT across all twelve novels according to BLEU automatic evaluated metric scores (12). In addition to it, in keeping with complementary human evaluation of three of the books, native speakers of the target language believed that between 17% and 34% of the translations made by NMT (compared to 8% and 20% with PBSMT) are of comparable quality to translations done by a qualified human translator (22). Therefore, Toral and Way were very optimistic about the future of Neural Machine Translation.

However, despite their optimism, the two theoreticians still found human translation to be generally superior, as not all literary features – style, shades of meaning – were captured by the Machine Translation (MT) systems. Their study shows that while NMT made clear gains over older statistical methods, there was still a gap between machine and high-quality human literary translation – though that gap kept narrowing.

Their research drew upon a previous study entitled “Translating Literary Text between Related Languages Using SMT” (2015), in which Toral and Way examined whether Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) could be effectively used to translate literary texts, focusing specifically on closely related languages (Spanish and Catalan). The article was important because it challenged the common belief that machine translation was useless for literary texts, especially by demonstrating promising results in a real novel translation scenario – opening the door for future work on both SMT and later NMT in literary contexts.

It is interesting that not only in the field of prose were attempts made to use machine translation; poetry was also targeted. Thus, Dmitriy Genzel, Jakob Uszkoreit and Franz Och had tried to explore, already in 2010, how statistical machine translation (SMT)

systems – specifically phrase-based SMT – could be adapted to translate poetry in a way that preserves rhyme and meter, two core formal features of many literary traditions. In “‘Poetic’ Statistical Machine Translation: Rhyme and Meter,” the above-mentioned authors treated meter and rhyme requirements as feature functions (160) within the SMT decoding process. They came up with a number of mechanisms to track syllable stress patterns in translation. Their experiments showed that the SMT system can generate outputs that conform to poetic constraints, but adding rhyme or meter constraints often affects translation quality. The paper is among the first to treat formal poetic qualities as concrete, measurable constraints in machine translation, paving the way for later research on controlled generation of text with rhyme and meter, both as translation and poetry creation.

Philippe Humblé also examined how well machine translation performs with poetry, which is traditionally seen as especially hard to translate because of its artistic features (style, rhythm, wordplay, etc.). Thus, in an article published in 2020, the author focuses on translations from English into Portuguese and compares machine output with human literary translations. Humblé analyzes three English poems: “A Letter Is a Joy of Earth” by Emily Dickinson, “To a Stranger” by Walt Whitman and “Sandra” by Charles Bukowski. He compares for each poem professional human translations into Portuguese by well-known translators in order to assess how well machine translation deals with poetic language. Humblé concludes that machine translations are surprisingly acceptable, that Google Translate performs better than expected, often producing translations that are quite readable and sometimes as acceptable as human versions. He suggests that particularly in cases of shorter phrases, the machine is not as weak as people often assume (48).

Humblé points out several predictable weaknesses in machine output: misinterpretation of polysemous words, errors with gender and number agreement and occasionally awkward or literal wording that misses nuance (45-48). These errors are, obviously, typical of automated systems because they lack deeper contextual

understanding. If machine translations are compared with human translations, Humblé suggests that human translators often produce elevated or stylistically rich versions that interpret the poems creatively. Furthermore, he pinpoints that Google Translate tends to stick to more literal renderings, which can be better in terms of faithfulness to original wording but also worse in terms of poetic effect and stylistic nuance (45).

Based on all these, Humblé contends that neither machine nor human translation perfectly captures all poetic features, but each has strengths. Machine translation for poetry is more capable than commonly thought, and its quality continues improving with advances (e.g., neural networks). While machines struggle with poetic features like alliteration, rhythm, and tone, they still produce results that could be useful, especially when paired with human oversight. The study suggests that machine translation may function as a helpful tool – not a replacement – for human translators, offering alternative literal renderings that can enrich human understanding (48-49). Thus, Humblé's work challenges the assumption that machine translation is unsuitable for high-level literary texts. It shows that even for poetry – a domain where meaning and form are deeply intertwined – machines can offer credible translations, though creative judgment remains essential.

From such attempts at automatic translation which were rather feeble, remarkable progress has been made once Large Language Models (LLMs) – GPT-4 in particular –, started operating. As Jianhao Yan et al. argue, according to recent research, GPT-4 can outperform commercial machine translation systems through both automatic and human evaluations, demonstrating that LLMs can function as a robust translation system and a good replacement for NMT models. As a consequence, numerous applications, such as GPT-4, have been accelerated by these momentous outcomes. However, as the authors point out, it is still unclear what the nature of LLM output is, especially in comparison with human translation. Therefore, they compared human translation against GPT-4 translations, concluding that not even experts can reach a consensus on which translation is better done.

Then, they took a second step and asked junior medium and senior translators, as well as GPT-4 to translate in three domains – news, technology and biomedical –, from resource-rich to resource-poor pairs of languages (Chinese – English, Russian – English and Chinese – Hindi). Independent expert annotators were subsequently hired to identify the errors under the Multidimensional Quality Metrics framework (MQM). The results of the study were that GPT-4 reaches a performance comparable to junior translators from the point of view of total errors made, but lagging significantly behind senior ones .

In this context, in which GPT-4 is noticeably credited, I intend to assess its performance in the case of a poem I have translated myself. As one who teaches poetry translation classes in an MA program in Translation Studies at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, and who has occasionally translated and published translations of poetry, I have been keen to find out how well GPT-4 performs, being quite certain that AI cannot handle poetry translation well. In what follows, I intend to highlight the weak points of GPT-4 in the translation of poetry, as well as raise a number of questions related to the ethics of using GPT-4 in poetry translation.

Thus, despite the optimism characteristic of many articles that point out the huge strides that AI translation has made – which are undeniable, indeed –, AI is still deficient at many levels and, in my opinion, will never successfully replace the human translator. I will refer to the poem “Dresden” by Irish poet Ciaran Carson (1948-2019) and to the challenges and difficulties I faced in the translation process, and discuss the errors that GPT-4 produced, in addition to various weak points of the end product. Translation will be analyzed both as process and as product, since in this case, the steps one takes in the translation process are meaningful and relevant.

When translating Carson's poetry, I was aware of the fact that he was one of the most gifted Northern Irish poets of the late 20th and early 21st century. Paradoxically enough, he is almost completely unknown in Romania, or, if known in academic circles, not known to the larger public as his work has not been translated and published at all so far. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, he is worth translating, as his work evinces a deep awareness of language and its nuances, all the more so as he was constantly preoccupied with how language shapes our understanding of place and self. Worth mentioning is also the fact that his poetry offers the reader a fascinating image of the Irish society, of Belfast in particular, since most of his poems are set against this background. The cultural and social fabric of Northern Ireland, especially during the Troubles to which he returns time and again, is intricately interwoven in his poetry. Carson frequently engages issues of identity, belonging and the effects of the sectarian conflict on people's lives and on communities. His poetry serves as a kind of witness pointing at the suffering brought about by the Troubles. Northern Ireland problems figure prominently in his poetry which depicts deeply unsettling socio-political landscapes, while also investigating the relationship between fact and imagination.

Carson resorts to languid long lines that mimic oral storytelling and musical rhythms. His long lines can carry a folk or traditional music-like cadence. Word-play, puns, and sound echoes appear throughout his poems, lending them a lively, layered quality. His voice often has a conversational, vernacular feel – like pub talk or a storyteller speaking directly to the reader. This grounded, sometimes ironic tone brings complex ideas and experience into immediate, accessible language.

Carson was very much interested in exploring “the possibility of getting some orality into the poetry” (Crosson 103). This interest resulted in work that would “veer between poetry and prose maybe, veer between music and haphazardness, between conversation and form” (Crosson 103). This would be noticeable in the sound-scapes that abound in Carson's poetry, often blending conversation and music. However, in Carson's poetry meaning

depends on and is created by the reader who is aware of the provisional and subjective character of meaning, especially in the context of Northern Ireland.

Most of these aspects are noticeable in “Dresden,” the poem under analysis, which, interestingly enough, is a war poem in disguise. However, “Dresden” is very different from the other war poems of the time. Named for a city that was destroyed by bombers in WWII, the poem points at obvious similarities between Dresden at war time and Belfast during the Troubles.

In his long narrative poem of lengthy unrhymed lines, Carson tells a story – the story of Horse Boyle (which is, obviously, a nickname), who “was called Horse Boyle because of his brother Mule” (obviously, another nickname). Nevertheless, it takes the poetic persona a long while until he gets to tell the story of Horse Boyle, more precisely it takes him more than seven long stanzas of nine lines each – a total of 890 words. “This is really Horse’s story” (66) the reader is finally told, after many hesitations and digressions, after equivocations and prevarications, after numerous mentions of violence and of suffering: “Dresden broke his heart. It reminded him of china” (72). The lyrical I had to brace himself for the obliteration of Dresden, and he did it in those many lines in which he tried to get to the story of Dresden. The catastrophe is described in terms of broken glass as Dresden was well-known for its production of high-quality porcelain, especially after the first Dresden porcelain factory was opened in 1710:

... a thousand tinkling echoes –
All across the map of Dresden, store-rooms full of china shattered,
teetered
And collapsed, an avalanche of porcelain, slushing and cascading:
cherubs,
Shepherdesses, figurines of Hope and Peace and Victory, delicate
bone fragments. (74-76)

This catastrophe becomes a symbol of all catastrophes – be they the Troubles which are explicitly mentioned in the poem or other forms of violence.

What is interesting is that this memory of the horror of Dresden awakens in Horse Boyle another memory, a trivial one, that speaks volumes about him: he recalls a figurine from his childhood, a milkmaid, which he had inadvertently dropped down so that all that remained of it was its “creamy hand, the outstretched / Pitcher of milk” (84-85). The ending comes abruptly, with the appearance of drunken Mule, and this makes it impossible for the narrator “to pick up the thread” (89).

Interestingly enough, beyond historical aspects, beyond the story of Dresden, and of the Troubles which are given almost equal space in the poem, of the Battle of Clontarf, among others, the poem engages language issues, and this makes it all the more difficult to translate. Carson combines colloquial and archaic language in order to suggest the artificial character of literary conventions. Furthermore, he often resorts to effects of anticlimax by lapses in mood from the sublime to the trivial or ridiculous, and these effects are achieved by linguistic means. He uses unusually long lines running across the page that imitate breathless storytelling and create a sense of overflowing detail, suggesting the overwhelming scale of destruction. The length of lines also intimates the effort to contain historical trauma, an effort that is doomed to fail.

On the other hand, the poem builds meaning through catalogs of detail – objects, places, fragments of history. This results in density and texture, suggesting how history is layered and reconstructed from fragments, from bits and pieces. It also points to the way in which memory works, piling image upon image. This accumulation can come to feel stifling, obsessive, hinting at the persistence of violence in collective memory.

The destruction of Dresden parallels the fractured geography of Belfast, being symbolic of cultural identity and historical trauma. The poem does not move in a straight line. Instead, it wanders through associations, shifts between past and present, blurs storytelling with reflection. This digressive structure reflects how memory and history are nonlinear. It interweaves the global and the local, depicting Northern Ireland during the Troubles,

despite zooming in on Dresden. Furthermore, Carson uses historical distance to comment indirectly on contemporary conflict. The poem suggests that destruction and rebuilding are cyclical, not isolated events. The voice is often calm, almost documentary, observational rather than emotional. This restraint, however, intensifies the emotional effect – devastation emerges through detail rather than dramatic statement in a tone that is detached yet haunting.

Even in these long prose-like lines, Carson maintains subtle internal rhyme, musical phrasing, carefully modulated rhythm. The poem's sonic features prevent it from becoming flat narrative. Together, these techniques create a poem that feels both sprawling and meticulously constructed – pointing at the way in which cities and histories are built from ruins.

The poem is anchored in the local. Mule and Horse live together in a ramshackle trailer in a secluded area outside of Carrick. The poem subtly suggests that a great deal of Ireland's current problems originate in this economic, cultural and emotional poverty. However, the narrator finds that the brothers' home base has some attractions, although of a unique, postmodernist type. He tells us that "baroque pyramids" are made out of heaps of empty baked-bean cans, just as their lives are made up of heaps of memories. In such a dilapidated caravan, the narrator will discover stories that will leave him at a loss for words.

These are all important issues that the translator will have to keep at the back of his mind when embarking on the translation process. Unsurprisingly, GPT-4 fails from the very beginning. It deals erroneously with vocabulary issues, failing to translate the nicknames – Horse Boyle and Mule – which it leaves untranslated. It is a matter of common knowledge that nicknames, in general, are important as they suggest character features. So much more in a poem in which ideas are condensed, and poets do not have the space to provide character delineation. In Carson's poem, character features take the upper hand, and their centrality is obvious since they appear at the very beginning of the poem. Furthermore, translation of nicknames has a strong impact on the reader, putting him in the picture, whereas lack of translation creates confusion,

leaving the reader in the dark. It is implied, by means of nicknames, that Boyle works like a horse whereas his brother is stubborn like a mule. What GPT-4 comes up with is “Horse Boyle era numit Horse Boyle din cauza fratelui său, Mule,” which is inappropriate both in terms of failure to translate nicknames and of wrong word choice for “called.” “Numit” is artificial and rarely used in Romanian in such a context. It may work with proper names but never with nicknames.

This is what GPT-4 came up with in the case of the first stanza, a variant among several which differ in tonality and approach:

Horse Boyle era numit Horse Boyle din cauza fratelui său, Mule;
De ce Mule era numit Mule este ghicirea oricui. Am stat acolo o
dată,
Sau mai degrabă, aproape am stat acolo o dată. Dar asta e o altă
poveste.
În orice caz, ei trăiau într-o rulotă dărăpănată, la nici două mile
de Carrick,
Încercuită de piramide baroce de cutii goale de fasole coaptă,
rugini
Și ocuri, indicii de toamnă contopindu-se în amurg. Horse
credea
Că erau la fel de bune ca un câine de pază, și ca să spun adevărul,
Nu te puteai apropia de loc fără ca ceva să cadă:
O mică avalanșă ar fi urmat – mai degrabă ca un clopoțel de
magazin, de fapt. (GPT-4)

It is a weak and confusing beginning, that fails to meet the norms of adequacy and acceptability that Gideon Toury advocated. Thus, according to Toury, adequate translations conform to the standards of the source language, whereas acceptable translations follow the standards of the target language (64). This ensures that translations are culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate.

One can refer, in this context, to the norms of adequacy and acceptability as developed by Anne Mette Hjort who contends that translations can and do meet the appropriateness requirements as

well as the intersubjectively mediated norms and conventions that are prevalent in the translation field in a particular culture at a particular moment (42-43). Hjort adds the subjectivity of the translator as a factor that has its importance in the translation process.

The norms of adequacy and acceptability as formulated by Toury are, however, open to interpretation. Thus, in her article entitled “Translation: Text and Pre-text. ‘Adequacy’ and ‘Acceptability’ in Crosscultural Communication,” Palma Zlateva correctly argues that one should reconsider Toury’s views, such as the following: ‘A translated text can be located on an axis between the two hypothetical poles of adequacy (source text oriented) or acceptability (target language oriented)’ (Toury 34). To Zlateva, such a remark appears to rule out the idea that a translated work “could ever be both adequate to the original and acceptable in the target language, since a +adequate translation will always be – acceptable one” (29). This will logically lead to the idea that “the only translated text to satisfy the conditions for being a metatext will be a translated text situated right in the middle of this axis, where we can only have zero adequacy and zero acceptability” (29). Zlateva rightly suggests that the acceptability of a text in the target language should be viewed as part of the adequacy of its translation.

Judging the acceptability of GPT-4 translation, one notices a lot of deviations from target language norms in the case of Carson’s poem. Thus “Nu te puteai apropia de loc” is very ambiguous and misleading. The zero article for “loc” makes it extremely confusing, and does not reflect at all the specific character of the “place” that takes definite article in English. The reader already knows what place the narrator is speaking about; it has already been described. “[F]ără ca ceva să cadă” is also inappropriate in this context because it sounds bad, slightly cacophonous. Word order in Romanian is flexible, so one can switch it and get something that is more natural and that flows: “fără să cadă ceva.”

The collocation “to tell the truth,” though correctly translated as “ca să spun adevărul,” is too verbose and too lengthy.

The four English syllables are translated by means of eight Romanian syllables. Something shorter and more pungent (such as “ce-i drept”) would have more impact on the reader. One should not forget that similarity of effect on the reader should also be targeted, and that it depends, to a large extent, on stylistic choices. Jean Boase-Beier’s theory related to the similarity of cognitive effect (since she advocated cognitive stylistics), i.e. “what makes a rendering of a text in another language a translation is the similarity of cognitive effect it makes possible, as judged by the translator” (53) is particularly apt.

GPT-4 also mixes up grammar issues. It mistakes the modal “would,” suggesting repeated action, for an auxiliary and ends up with “S-ar fi pornit o mică avalanșă” for “A minor avalanche would ensue.” This grammar mistake occurs many times in the GPT-4 translation, the repetitive aspect being completely obliterated such as in “he’d be on about McGinty then” / “atunci ar fi început să vorbească despre McGinty.”

However, the area in which GPT-4 fails completely is that of condensation, where the text is highly elliptical. Great poetry thrives on condensation, as Ezra Pound suggested, on things half said, on allusions and suggestions: “poetry is the most concentrated form of verbal expression” (Pound 36). Such an instance of highly condensed language is the following description in the first stanza: “pyramids of empty baked bean tins, rusts / And ochres, hints of autumn merging into twilight” (5-6). The passage is a colourful description of the caravan, but it is botched up by GPT-4, which is unable to handle the shades and come up with something that would meet the standard of acceptability: “rugini / și ocuri, indicii de toamnă contopindu-se în amurg.” “Rugini și ocuri” is left suspended, with no clear determination. The zero article would make one think there were tins of rusts and ochres, since “baked bean” also has zero article. In addition to this, there is the problem of the “baked bean” which GPT-4 translates literally as “fasole coaptă” but no such dish exists in Romanian. Cultural adaptation is necessary here in order to come up with something that makes sense and is acceptable in the target language. “Fasole scăzută”

would probably work better, since this is a type of dish that any Romanian reader would have heard of.

GPT-4 does not recognize idioms, either. It wrongly translates an idiom such as “to be anyone’s guess” as “*este ghicirea oricărui*,” which is not only wrong but also unacceptable in the target language. Equally inappropriate and not in keeping with the spirit of the Romanian language is the translation of such an expression: “And many’s the young *cub* left the school, as wise as when he came” (54; emphasis added) as “*Și mulți tineri puișori au părăsit școala, la fel de înțelepți ca atunci când au venit*” (emphasis added). “*Puișori*” (chickens) is never used in Romanian with reference to students who finish school. Furthermore, it always has a positive connotation in Romanian, which is not the case with Carson’s poem. The Romanian “*juncan*” (young ox or bull, not yet harnessed) works far better as it also has the slang meaning of a young, foolish and stubborn person in the target language. It is also more appropriate, given the fact that there is a saying in Romanian which uses words from the lexical field of oxen: “*s-a dus bou și s-a întors vacă*” (“he was an ox when he went away and had turned into a cow by the time he came back”) – one of the expressions that have remained in popular consciousness since the 19th century when the children of wealthier Romanians were sent to schools abroad and many returned home without having learnt much. This idea of not having learnt much is suggested in Carson’s poem as well; therefore, cultural translation would presuppose transfer of cultural carriers as well. “To keep one’s ears to the ground” is literally translated as “*a avea urechile lipite de pământ*” instead of suggesting its meaning “*era atent la tot ce mișcă*” (was on the alert).

This brings us to the larger issue of cultural translation. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere are right when they claim that translation cannot be separated from culture. Language is part and parcel of the body of culture – translators must understand cultural contexts as much as language in order to convey meaning appropriately. Ignoring this cultural embeddedness may result in distortions of the original text. Mary Snell-Hornby also exhorted linguists “to abandon their ‘scientific’ attitude and to move from

‘text’ as a putative ‘translation unit’ to culture – a momentous step that would go far beyond the move from the word as a ‘unit’ to the text” (qtd. in Bassnett and Lefevere 4).

For the sake of comparison, this is what I suggest for the first stanza:

Calu’ Boyle a primit numele Calu’ Boyle din pricina fratelui său,
Catâru’;
Deși de ce i se spunea Catârului Catâr nu știa nimeni. Am stat o
dată acolo,
Sau, mai degrabă, aproape că am stat o dată acolo. Dar asta e o
altă poveste.
În orice caz, trăiau într-o rulotă hodorogită, la nici trei kilometri
de Carrick,
Năpădiți de piramide baroce de conserve goale de fasole scăzută,
în tonuri de
Rugină și ocră, indicii ale toamnei ce se pierdea în amurg. Calu’
credea
Că sunt pe post de câini de pază, și, ce-i drept,
Nu te puteai apropia de locul acela fără să cadă ceva:
Apoi urma o mică avalanșă, funcționau, mai degrabă ca un
clopoțel de magazin. (Mitrea)

Getting back to the idea of acceptability, and alignment to the norms of the target language, one notices that GPT-4 also invents words, a fact that is unacceptable. When the target language does not offer a corresponding verb, GPT-4 simply invents its own verb: “the bell would tinkle” / “clopoțelul clincheta,” or “smuggle” / “a contrabandiza,” “Irish” (as a language) / “îrlandezește.” And one can continue with such examples of words invented starting from existing words: “celele,” “ghicirea,” to mention but a few.

GPT-4 also fails to convert units of measurement. It translates “miles” literally, as “mile,” despite the fact that this unit of measurement is never used in Romanian. Adaptation to “kilometers” would have worked far better. The same applies to “o liră de cârnați” for “a pound of sausages.”

GPT-4 is, clearly, not aware of usage conventions. It mentions the subject in Romanian when speakers usually resort to an implied subject. For “they lived in this decrepit caravan,” no Romanian speaker would mention the subject as it is included in the verb inflection, all the more so as the subject was clearly mentioned in the previous sentence. Similarly, “Tell me this” is erroneously translated as “Întreabă-mă asta” which no Romanian speaker would say. It is correct but not in use. Along the same lines, “gradul și numărul ei de serie” uses the possessive “ei” (“its”) though possessives are not necessary in Romanian, unless they are used for the sake of differentiation. GPT-4 also fails in the case of “Eu făceam că nu știu” where it does not identify the Romanian reflexive voice. Other awkward, inaccurate translations are “curea de piele a lui McGinty. . . / umplută cu monede de trei penny pentru greutate și durere” (McGinty's leather strap would come up then, stuffed / With threepenny bits to give it weight and sting) or “chipul ei de trandafir și smântână” (for “her rose of mouth and cream”).

Word choice is a persistent problem with GPT-4. Word choice depends on the context, so it looks that GPT-4 is unable to take in the context and make the right choices. “They lived in this decrepit caravan, not two miles out of Carrick, / Encroached upon by baroque pyramids” (4-5) is rendered as “trăiau într-o rulotă dărăpănată, la nici două mile de Carrick, încercuită” which changes the meaning, suggesting that these pyramids of tins were outside the caravan. “Bicicleta polițistului / *Se înțepase*” (emphasis added) sounds really awkward in Romanian and totally unacceptable in such a context.

A very serious deficiency of the GPT-4 translation is the failure to adapt abbreviations. GPT-4 renders “RUC – or was it the RIC?” identically: “RUC-ul – sau era RIC-ul?,” failing to transfer cultural context. Royal Ulster Constabulary and Royal Irish Constabulary may seem similar, since only a letter differs, but, in actual fact, they carry deep meaning for Irish readers, reminding them of the Troubles (RUC) and of the role these two institutions played in Irish history (RIC) especially in the context of the establishment of the Irish free state in 1922.

There is, yet, another aspect where GPT-4 fails completely: music. As Ovidiu Matiu suggests, “[o]ne of the most important features of poetry is undoubtedly musicality . . . as [t]his is what makes a poem live within the minds and souls of the readers, and prevents its dissolution in time” (131). We cannot speak of music in the case of the GPT-4 translation, when word choice is constantly mishandled. Even when GPT is not wrong, it sounds flat, prosaic, with nothing of the music characteristic of the original: “to tell the whole townland the latest / Situation” is rendered as “ca să spună întregului ținut / cele mai noi vești.”

Apart from all these deficiencies in the GPT-4 translation, which call for a new translation of the poem, there is another issue worth considering: that of ethical aspects. Who does the translation finally belong to when GPT-4 supposedly does the translation and a human translator edits it (which would be a waste of time in the case of the poem I have dwelt on in this article)? Who is eventually the author? Why would a professional translator use AI when s/he can do a better job without it? Only because AI translates faster? But why should time matter in the case of poetry translation? Poetry translation has never been an emergency, so why should so much effort be invested in an enterprise that will never fare without an editor? What professional translator would want to “fix” a translation that has flaws? And if professional translators who are well-versed in translating poetry will not do it, can we trust novice translators who lack experience and are unaware of the various traps they may fall into?

Some of these questions are also present in Wen Peng’s article entitled “The Ethics of Machine Translation in the Era of Artificial Intelligence.” Peng explores the ethical challenges and implications of machine translation (MT) in the context of rapid advances in artificial intelligence. Peng’s study argues that while AI-driven MT technologies bring efficiency and improved accessibility to multilingual communication, they also raise important ethical concerns that must be addressed to ensure responsible use.

Thus, one needs to consider core ethical issues related to contemporary MT such as Data Privacy in the context in which massive amounts of text data are used to train MT models – often without informed consent –, raising concerns about how personal or proprietary text is collected, stored, and reused (Peng 138).

A very sensitive issue that Peng deals with is that of copyright and ownership. Using copyrighted materials as training data can create legal and ethical disputes over who owns the output, who gets credit, and how creators are compensated. The issue of accountability is also very sensitive given the fact that, when an MT system produces harmful or misleading translations, it is unclear who should be held responsible – the developer, the deployer, or the system itself (Peng 138).

Cultural and linguistic bias should also be kept in mind as MT models may reproduce cultural biases present in their training data. This can distort meaning or perpetuate stereotypes, especially across different language communities.

Among the solutions proposed by Peng are better data handling practices that presuppose improving transparency and consent mechanisms around data collection and usage. The creation and implementation of laws and industry norms to clarify rights, responsibilities, and accountability in MT development and use are highly necessary. Furthermore, encouraging cooperation between technologists, linguists, ethicists, and policymakers to balance technological innovation with moral responsibility is also highly advisable (139). Adriana Neagu makes a similar case in her June 2023 editorial to *American, British and Canadian Studies* journal when she states: “it is of the essence for scholars in the humanities to engage not in sheer contemplation but in forward-looking, cross-disciplinary dialogue” (4).

In conclusion, the necessity of ethical frameworks is more stringent than ever. Technological advancement should go hand in hand with legislative and transdisciplinary initiative to ensure that social justice, individual rights and cultural diversity are promoted. This is to say that we have a very long way to go until we are able to successfully resort to AI in literary translation.

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