



COLLECTION DE PAPIERS SCIENTIFIQUES SUR LES MATÉRIAUX DE LA

X CONFÉRENCE SCIENTIFIQUE ET PRATIQUE INTERNATIONALE

**«Débats scientifiques et orientations
prospectives du développement scientifique»**



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COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF S. ZHADAN'S POEM "SHE IS FIFTEEN AND SELLS FLOWERS AT THE RAILWAY STATION" PRODUCED BY LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS AND A HUMAN TRANSLATOR

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Introduction. In recent years, translation studies have increasingly focused on the problem of comparing translations produced by humans and those generated with the assistance of large language models (LLMs). While such systems have already demonstrated a high degree of accuracy and consistency in translating technical and scientific texts, their effectiveness in literary translation remains controversial. The principal challenge lies in reproducing poetic imagery, the author's individual style, rhythm, intonation, and cultural subtext, all of which require not only linguistic competence but also psychological interpretation. Poetry, as an art of language, demands from the translator not merely the transfer of meaning, but also the preservation of the poetic quality, rhythm, imagery, and emotional colouring of the original text [1]. A poetic text confronts the translator as a multi-layered system of sounds, symbols, and images that must not only be represented, but also conveyed to a reader who "cannot fully imagine" all the subtleties of the translator's work [2, p. 133].

Large language models (LLMs) have transformed the way language is processed and understood, opening new possibilities for natural language comprehension, generation, and communication [3]. Unlike traditional human translation, which can convey the subtleties of literary expression, machine translation offers speed and scalability but often falls short in quality. These limitations are largely caused by the complex nature of literature, which extends beyond mere linguistic equivalence. Addressing issues of accuracy, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity in the development of AI-assisted translation will make it possible to preserve the artistry and ethics of translation while simultaneously meeting the demands of a globalized world [3].

The aim of the study was to identify the potential and limitations of large language models (LLMs) in the field of literary translation and to determine whether they are capable not only of reproducing lexical accuracy, but also of conveying the multilayered nature of a literary text — its emotional plane, irony, cultural allusions, rhythm, and the internal musicality of language.

Results and Discussion. For the purposes of the analysis, the poem “She Is Fifteen and Sells Flowers at the Railway Station” by Serhiy Zhadan was selected. The author portrays adolescent vulnerability, war, social isolation, and the gradual process of growing up through the prism of everyday life in a small industrial town. The text combines documentary concreteness with profound emotionality, metaphorical richness, and directness of expression. It is particularly suitable for the study of translation strategies because its rhythm and emotional intensity require a precise sensitivity to living language. Human translation tends to emphasize the social context, the inner pain, and the fragmented rhythm of the original, whereas translations produced by LLMs are generally inclined toward formal accuracy while often losing the atmosphere, the depth of context, and the poetic playfulness of the source text.

Three English translations were selected for comparison: the translation by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin (human translation), a translation generated by OpenAI ChatGPT, and a translation generated by Google Gemini. This made it possible to trace the difference between interpretation shaped by human linguistic intuition and the output of machine models operating on formal linguistic patterns.

The study's methodological framework included comparative, semantic, stylistic, linguopoetic, and contextual methods of analysis, focusing not only on translation accuracy but also on its aesthetic, emotional, and cultural adequacy.

From a semantic perspective, the translation by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin is the most accurate at reproducing the poem's semantic structure and social subtext. The lines “She’s fifteen, sells flowers at the train station. / Soldiers go to the East, soldiers go to the West” preserve the laconic style and restrained emotionality that are characteristic features of Serhiy Zhadan’s poetic manner. The contrast between the ordinary and the tragic is maintained here: the simple statement about a girl selling flowers coexists with the image of war, which remains quietly present “in the background” of her life. Such semantic density ensures the multilayered nature of the text through the combination of intimate, social, and political dimensions.

In the ChatGPT translation, a shift in semantic emphasis can be observed: instead of social concreteness, the text acquires a more generalized poetic quality: “She’s fifteen, and she’s selling flowers by the station, / Sweet air hums beyond the mines with sun and berry’s elation.” Here, the lexical choices “hums” and “elation”

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create an emotionally saturated atmosphere, yet they blur the realistic tone of the original. As a result, war, coldness, and exhaustion — themes central to Zhadan's poetry — give way to an abstract sense of beauty and melodiousness.

The Gemini translation also demonstrates semantic deviations, although in the opposite direction: "She is fifteen, and she sells blooms upon the train station ground. / The oxygen sweet by the mines, where the sun and the berries are found." While certain images are retained, the vocabulary appears archaic — "blooms," "upon," "are found" — producing a sense of temporal and spatial remoteness. Such lexical choices alter the semantic nature of the poem: instead of a contemporary and harsh reality, the reader encounters a detached, almost idyllic picture.

With regard to assonance and alliteration, the human translation is distinguished by the restraint and naturalness of its sound patterning. For example, the repetition of vowel sounds in the line "Sun and berries sweeten the oxygen beyond the mines" reproduces the smoothness and calmness of the original intonation. Likewise, in the line "Soldiers go to the East, soldiers go to the West," the soft repetition of the [s] sound creates a rhythmic wave that reinforces the sense of movement and the continuous cycle of life conveyed in the original poem.

By contrast, the machine-generated versions produced by ChatGPT and Gemini reveal a certain artificiality in their sound combinations. The excessive use of rhyming pairs such as "elation / station" and "found / ground" creates an impression of forced euphony, uncharacteristic of Serhiy Zhadan's poetic style. In particular, the ChatGPT rendering "She's fifteen, and she's selling flowers by the station" is grammatically correct, yet it loses the emotional tension and internal rhyme of the Ukrainian original, turning instead into a mere statement of fact. The human translation, by contrast, preserves both laconic expression and emotional depth, allowing the reader to sense pain, exhaustion, and the heroine's vulnerability behind the apparent simplicity of the words — features that are central to Zhadan's poetics.

A significant difference between the translations can also be observed in terms of rhythm and rhyme. All three versions reproduce the core meaning of Serhiy Zhadan's lines; however, they do so with varying degrees of poeticity and rhythmic organization. In the translation by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin — "She's fifteen, sells flowers at the train station. / Sun and berries sweeten the oxygen beyond the mines" — semantic accuracy and the natural simplicity of imagery characteristic of Zhadan's poetry are preserved. This translation gravitates toward free verse, without a clearly defined rhyme scheme, which allows it to convey the naturalness and rhythmic "irregularity" of the original while emphasizing the urban dryness and documentary quality of the text.

By contrast, the ChatGPT version introduces greater rhythmic density and internal rhyme: “She’s fifteen, and she’s selling flowers by the station, / Sweet air hums beyond the mines with sun and berry’s elation.” This creates euphony and melodiousness, yet at the same time somewhat smooths over the realistic sharpness and conversational intonation typical of Zhadan’s style. The Gemini translation — “She is fifteen, and she sells blooms upon the train station ground. / The oxygen sweet by the mines, where the sun and the berries are found” — likewise reproduces the meaning accurately; however, its rhythm appears heavier due to syntactic overload and a more formal structure. Although rhyme is present (“ground — found”), it sounds more mechanical than organic. Compared with the human translation, the Gemini version appears more archaic and less emotionally expressive, yet it still preserves the integrity of the imagery.

The difference in the rendering of emotional tone is particularly evident in the line “Коли згадувати немає кого, вона засинає.” The translation by Hennessy and Kin retains the cold simplicity and quiet hopelessness inherent in the original. It functions as a statement of loss without excessive poetic style, conveying the ordinariness of pain. ChatGPT, on the other hand, opts for a more metaphorical rendering: “And when there’s no one left — she dreams who they are,” introducing the image of dreaming as a form of spiritual consolation, which is absent from the original text, yet creating a different — softer, almost symbolic — emotional effect. In the Gemini translation — “When there’s no one left to remember, she closes her eyes for the day” — the text acquires a sense of calmness and completion more closely associated with rest than with loss, thereby diminishing the tragic depth of the ending.

From a stylistic perspective, the human translation adheres to the principle of minimal intervention: it neither introduces new images nor attempts to embellish the text, fully corresponding to the documentary poetics characteristic of Serhiy Zhadan. The translations produced by ChatGPT and Gemini demonstrate greater interpretative freedom. ChatGPT frequently resorts to poetic insertions such as “She stands at dawn in her place of sorrow,” which are absent from the original.

With regard to emotional intensity, the translation by J. Hennessy and O. Kin most accurately conveys the sorrowful detachment and sense of fatality characteristic of Zhadan’s poetry. In the lines “Nobody stays in her city. / Nobody wants to take her with them,” one can perceive restrained hopelessness: the translators preserve the cold simplicity that produces a profound emotional effect. In the ChatGPT version, this passage acquires an additional rhythmic and rhyming layer: “No one halts in her humble hometown, / No one takes her hand when the sun goes down.” The rhyme (“hometown – down”) and the song-like melodiousness make the text more emotionally expressive while, at the same time, softening the

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tragic restraint of the original. In the Gemini version, this fragment is rendered in an excessively descriptive manner: “In her city, no one ever chooses to stop. / No one yearns to take her away...” The syntax is overly straightforward, giving the text a prosaic quality and diminishing its poetic tension.

Conclusions. Thus, the translation by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin may be regarded as the most successful in conveying the poetics of Serhiy Zhadan, since it preserves semantic accuracy, rhythmic naturalness, and restrained emotionality — all characteristic features of the poet’s style. The translators succeeded in conveying the context of war, loss, and the heroine’s gradual maturation without distorting the delicate balance between everyday reality and profound inner pain that is intrinsic to Zhadan’s poetry. Their version is distinguished by psychological authenticity and cultural sensitivity, enabling the English-speaking reader to experience the same reality as the lyrical heroine.

By contrast, the translations produced by OpenAI ChatGPT and Google Gemini, despite their technical proficiency and rhymed structure, move away from the author’s original intention, transforming realistic social poetry into a more generalised lyrical narrative. These versions make emotions sound artificial, as though the algorithm attempts to “make the text beautiful” without fully understanding the character’s inner motivation. In the ChatGPT translation, the text becomes smoother and more melodious, yet loses the bitterness and tension of the original, whereas the Gemini version gravitates toward literalism, making the imagery feel cold and static.

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