

AI, an Opportunity to Reappraise Translation Theories?

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Abstract: The paper problematises the use of AI tools in translation practices but their apparent absence from translation theory. The main argument of the paper is that we should explore how AI can be applied in validating new and old translation theories. AI is seen as an opportunity to reappraise concepts and statements about translation, to determine which ones should not be forgotten, and which ones might need to be modified or discarded due to inconsistencies or insufficient empirical evidence. To this end, the paper focuses on the work of two prestigious authors, Jakobson (1959) and Holmes (1988), while also referring to others, such as Vermeer (1978) and Toury (1995). Presented as an example of what the author is calling for, this study includes a critical review of Jakobson's claim that there are three types of translation: intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic. The implications are more far-reaching than might be expected, showing how different approaches to Jakobson's typology depend on different notions of what translation is. The paper proposes updating or finding alternatives to Jakobson's three types. Finally, the author revisits his own theoretical model from several decades ago, to compare his original idea of a model based on priorities and restrictions with the present-day notion of prompting for AI.

Keywords: AI, translation theory, intersemiotic translation, prompts, multimodality

1. A general introductory note

AI has dominated discussions and debates across numerous academic and professional areas over the last few years and is doing so ever more intensely. Translation in particular has been affected and targeted. AI can be seen as an existential threat or a shackle-freeing opportunity for machines to take over jobs no human ever wanted to do in the first place or would be willing to exchange for a more fulfilling job or a more meaningful lifestyle.

Some people are comforted by the hope that machines will never perform as well as human beings, especially in non-mechanical jobs that require some degree

of creativity or human touch. This begs the question, what if machines eventually outperform humans in every activity, including work, play and entertainment, just as they did in the game of chess? We may be happy to accept that machines are not good enough, but what if we accept for a moment that they might become plausible alternatives in every walk of life? What would/will happen if/when we are no longer in a scenario where people communicate with machines and ask them to do tasks, but where the human being is often cut out of the equation altogether, and chatbots can talk to each other, give instructions and carry out tasks without human intervention?

One argument often put forward is that it is no longer necessary to know or learn a lot of things that used to be taught in school, for example, because why bother if you can simply ask AI whenever you want to access certain data?

This trend, which some people find worrying, and these existential questions also come at a time of increasing doubt in and even suspicion towards experts and scientists, and more broadly, anyone with a solid educational background. A growing ideology supports the notion that science is to be distrusted and, by extension, so is anyone with access to unbiased, fact-based evidence and an ability for logical reasoning and critical thinking. This ideology promotes the notion that anyone's opinion on any subject is as valid as anyone else's, regardless of training or expertise, with opinions formed and evaluated by variables that have nothing to do with the issue at hand, such as church membership, birthplace, and parents' affiliations.

I, for one, am particularly worried that AI could stand simultaneously for artificial intelligence and anti-intellectualism, as two sides of the same coin. So, with regard to the notion that machines will do everything for us, to the extent that we will not need to know anything (including general knowledge), gain specialised training or acquire certain basic skills, then the following question arises: if or when, one day, AI can produce and translate great literature (and other art forms), and stage and screenplay scripts and productions, how would humans be able to recognise their merit, enjoy them and otherwise respond to the overall stimulus of works of art, philosophy and instruction, if they lack the intellectual means of doing so, the necessary literacy and appreciation skills, such as sufficient background in reading, debating and writing? Without these skills, they would not be able to recognise intertextual references, allusions, cultural elements, symbolism, irony, parody and so on. They would therefore be deprived of the enjoyable and enriching experiences of challenging art forms, essays, and debates, and in the end would only respond to short videos of kittens or dance routines. They would also miss out on the richness of interpersonal relationships cultivated through real-world experiences—such as travel rather than virtual substitutes, face-to-face conversations, and gatherings for cultural events, recitals, and other shared activities.

2. AI in Translation Studies

If we leave aside for a moment all of the ethical, moral, social and existential issues involved (and I realise that is a lot to set aside), we might agree that if AI does a better job of translating or in some way helps deliver better (or cheaper?) or somehow more efficient translation processes or products, then it seems natural to embrace this as a positive development. A lot of time, effort and resources are being put into AI-driven or AI-assisted translation. On the academic front, a lot of research and proposals are also being published, posted, and debated (Jiménez Crespo 2025; Moorkens and Guerberof Arenas 2024). One area that has not enjoyed the same amount of attention is translation theory, and by this, I mean reflections on how AI might shed light on the validity and scope of each translation theory, if such an endeavour is even possible. I say this not so much to endorse AI, but because given the times we now live in, we could suppose that people may find any debate more attractive if it can be seen through the lens of AI. This might therefore be a way of rekindling interest in the core theoretical questions surrounding translation studies and practices.

There has been a trend within translation studies (TS) to move on from topics that seem stale or to have stalled onto new research questions before we have found satisfactory answers to the previous ones or at least answers that enjoy a broad consensus. It could even be argued that some of these questions are core issues that define the field. Questions like: What is translation? What is its nature? What are its boundaries? What are its variables? What are its alternatives? Why, how, when, where, for/by whom are translations produced and for what purpose(s)? Rather than sticking to these questions until they are answered, many scholars have turned their attention to new areas of inquiry, such as the implications of postcolonialism, feminism, accessibility, and related issues for translation—much like a biologist taking an interest in a new subspecies before sufficient understanding and consensus have been reached regarding the species category to which all the subspecies belong. This is deflecting the question or delaying the answer by opening a new line of questioning. While it must be said that all of these trends have shed some light and provided some insight given that they are within the domain of TS, it is also true that the core issues still need to be addressed, and they cannot be fully answered by allowing one trend to dominate.

The point is that with the advent of AI, we may wish to return to the core questions of translation, without in any way abandoning all the new ones that are now open, to see if certain theories and tenets withstand probing from AI. The hypothesis here is that if a theoretical concept or model is to be proven relevant and useful, it must somehow be demonstrable by probing questions put to the test in AI, assuming, that is, that both the theory and the AI tools work the way we expect them to and produce reliable results. We might add that if AI throws up positive feedback for any theory, it would also be advisable to obtain further confirmation by other means.

Firstly, we could ask AI tools and technologies to list and compare theoretical positions regarding translation versus adaptation (i.e. to test theoretical definitions and boundaries of translation), to see which ones are more consistent from a terminological and theoretical point of view. Alternatively, in a manner more closely aligned with the “applied studies” branch proposed by Holmes (1988), we could provide AI with prompts such as “translate this text according to [...],” where the blank is filled with theoretical concepts such as domestication or intersemiotic translation. This would thereby test the validity of Lawrence Venuti’s (1995) and Roman Jakobson’s (1959) theories, respectively.

If more metatheory and theory criticism were undertaken (as encouraged by Holmes), we could rank certain theories according to their coherence and scope, with regard to the internal logic or flaws therein, or to how they reflect or account for real-life translation assignments, either as a whole or in certain ways or passages, or their usefulness in applied areas, such as training, policy-making, criticism, and the design of tools and resources.

In this paper, I would like to take a critical look at three cases and propose that projects involving AI might be legitimate ways of validating certain hypotheses or claims about these cases. They are the hypotheses of Holmes (1988) and Jakobson (1959), as well as my own theoretical proposal of Priorities and Restrictions (Zabalbeascoa 1999).

I believe that Holmes is underrated, underquoted and often misrepresented or misunderstood with respect to his famous (and much quoted, though probably not enough) paper written in 1972 and published in 1988, “The name and nature of translation studies”. By contrast, I would venture to say that Jakobson has been overquoted, abused if you will, and is just as misunderstood or misrepresented as Holmes, but with the opposite effect. Whereas the figure of Jakobson has been elevated within translation studies almost to founder or at least cornerstone status, Holmes was discovered too late by translation scholars, and through indirect routes via other publications that explained his work. This is ironic because Holmes writes clearly and coherently. While I would argue that Jakobson is not without merit, judging by his output, translation was never his primary focus of attention and he has a very particular understanding of it (Zabalbeascoa 2025): he sees it as a means of gauging meaning from one language to another or across semiotic sign systems, not as a motivated sociohistorical activity with an ever-changing agenda and many dimensions (historical, political, labour, technological, stylistic, etc.).

In his now famous “map”, Holmes mentions and allows for machine translation in opposition to or in combination with (assisted) human translation. He states that no general theory of translation can properly be called “general” unless it takes into account the two poles of machine and human translation and every possible combination in between, and theory that only accounts for human or machine (MT or AI) translation is “restricted to one of those two media” (Holmes 1988: 74). Holmes is also aware that *translation* can be used in opposition to (oral) *interpreting*, but that

there is also an all-encompassing meaning of the word *translation* to include both written and spoken translation. It is this broader meaning that he attributes to the term translation studies (TS), to include all translation phenomena, practices and means of research and theory building.

By contrast, Jakobson sees himself as a linguist and philosopher. He sees translation as a component of linguistic science, not an independent field of research in need of its own theory. Thus, translation is viewed as a means of getting to and accounting for lexical meaning and semantic equivalence across languages. From the same perspective, *intralingual translation* (Table 1, $L1 \mapsto L1$) is basically just another way of referring to synonymy, and *intersemiotic translation* (Table 1, $S1 \mapsto S2$) is seen as a way of adapting a message or meaning from one sign system to another (e.g. written instructions to wordless graphic or cartoon-like pictures and symbols). Neither intralingual nor intersemiotic translation is given “translation proper” status and this is only granted to *interlingual translation* ($L1 \mapsto L2$). Jakobson’s claims—which as far as TS theory goes, are little more than terminological proposals—suffer from two problems: one is their internal logic, which emerges if we take a critical look at the various claims and proposals made within his essay. The other is by trying to measure his proposal’s applicability up against the reality of the increasingly multimodal and multilingual translation landscape, including a range of dimensions, such as professional practices, social motivations and constraints, historical developments, communicative goals, entertainment and sensorial values, accessibility, cultural dynamics, to mention a few.

Due to limitations of space, I can simply note here that Jakobson’s terms are not ideal for explaining the landscape’s rich reality and associated TS. The reason is that this was not really his intention and it is here that the main misunderstanding lies. When he says “poetry by definition is untranslatable” (Jakobson, 1959: 238), he means that poetry has a different agenda to ascribing a single universally accepted denotational meaning to each word and phrase, which is the level on which his three types of translation are meant to operate. He implies that lexico-semantic equivalence is the standard by which to assess translation quality. For him, any deviation from literal translation entails moving away from “translation proper” towards something else he prefers to call *transposition* or adaptation. If we were to see translation through his lens, we could certainly conclude that machine translation (MT) was already producing satisfactory results within those parameters. Even AI has moved beyond Jakobson’s notions and is branding itself as being able to translate “creatively”. If nothing else, this kind of claim is an admission that translation is more than lexical equivalents.

3. Updating three types of translation: across, within, mix

Considering the variety of translation modes and specialisations—such as literary translation (including poetry), audiovisual translation, legal translation, scientific

translation, interpreting, accessibility-related translation, instructional texts, and song lyrics—and attempts to provide descriptive or theoretical accounts of translation realities that are the result of translators' work and society's reaction to it, translations can be classified, in the broadest terms, as *textual operations* ($T1 \mapsto T2$), purposefully changing one text into another. In this process, all textual features and functions—verbal, paraverbal, non-verbal, rhetorical, stylistic, and discursive—may be taken into consideration. By *text*, we mean any act of communication between humans (while conceding that AI can mimic or replicate it) using a composition of conventional sign systems—such as words, pictograms, mime—along with compositional rules (grammar and discourse) whereby meaning-making is negotiated between at least two parties, through authoring/uttering and receiving/interpreting. This is very much in line with de Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) concept of text (with essential conditions of *textuality*), with the added clarification that multimodal and audiovisual texts need to be included, along with their distinctive grammars and discourses (e.g. the language of film). Fortunately, their approach to text linguistics does not exclude the possibility of non-verbal signs being used in text composition even if they do not develop this notion.

Jakobson's starting point is systemic comparative linguistics, which involves comparing languages, essentially through their lexicons and grammars by the standard of equivalence. He contrasts *interlingual translation* ($L1 \mapsto L2$) with *intralingual translation* ($L1 \mapsto L1$) to distinguish between comparing the meanings of words across languages and within the same language. But the reality of translated texts (including poems and films, among others) forces us to admit that real-life texts (spoken, written, audiovisual or otherwise multimodal) often include a *mix* (see Table 1) of different languages—or language variations—even if we only consider the lexical plane of verbal communication (by stripping away any contextual, material or paraverbal factors, as Jakobson's style of lexical semantics does). If $L1$ is the main or sole source language and $L2$ is the main or sole target language, then $L3$ is a label for the presence of any other language(s) in a message or text or its translation. Because $L3$ just means “not $L1$ in $T1$, and not $L2$ in $T2$ ”, then $L3$ (in $T1$) and $L3$ (in $T2$) may or may not be the same language. Having established what $L1$, $L2$ and $L3$ are, a multilingual text is any source text with a $L1+L3$ combination (also $L1a+L1b$ if two languages are equally “main”), or $L2+L3$ in the case of translations ($T2$). $L1(+L3) \mapsto L2(+L3)$, which expresses only the verbal dimension of the textual operation, uses parentheses to indicate scenarios where there is $L3$ potentially in $T1$ or $T2$, or both (Corrius and Zabalbeascoa 2011; Zabalbeascoa 2025). As an alternative notation, *multi-L* is short for multilingual combinations (two or more languages), and *(multi-)-L* for a message or text that is monolingual or multilingual, such that $(multi-)-L \mapsto (multi-)-L$ represents the potential presence of multilingualism on either side of a translation operation ($\mapsto$). The question remains about the applicability in today's world of Jakobson's *intersemiotic translation* ($S1 \mapsto S2$) between semiotic sign systems, and whether it can include or be surpassed by modern day terms and realities, like *transmedia*.

As first proposed, *intralingual translation*—i.e. $L1 \mapsto L1$, as an exercise in synonymy or paraphrase—does not work as a basis for a full account of real-life projects (e.g. closed captions, live subtitles), because it ignores user and use variation (sociolects, dialects, chronolects, jargon), bias (prejudices), history, accessibility factors and other influences that determine word selection and turns of phrase.

In its original formulation, *interlingual translation* ($L1 \mapsto L2$) does not encompass all foreign-language translations, especially written and audiovisual fiction, because it ignores or excludes multilingual combinations—*(multi-)L* $\mapsto$ *(multi-)L*—of words in texts (novels or films with invented languages, gibberish or words selected and arranged in one language to mimic another just to name a few examples of this very rich phenomenon), pragmatics and culture (Ranzato and Zabalbeascoa 2024). Jakobson was likely not considering multilingual texts, since his point of departure was not the text itself, but rather the comparison of individual language systems.

Intersemiotic translation ($S1 \mapsto S2$ in Table 1) has limitations when its unstated notion of language (L in Table 1) is a poor representation of interpersonal verbal communication, given that the linguistic sign does not—and cannot—appear interpersonally without material support, a mode, a medium, a context or a performance. A text consisting exclusively of verbal elements, without any accompanying paraverbal features, is not possible, because words are abstractions and communication requires that words be given shape (paraverbal features), and the shapes of words (ways of writing, speaking, performing and displaying) can often convey their own meaning and be interpreted as textual elements or affect the interpretation of the words they carry. Additionally, we must consider texts that combine signs from different sign systems, often referred to as multimodal (multi-M, in Table 1). For these reasons, the borders between the terms *intralingual* – *interlingual* – *intersemiotic* are far from clear-cut for practical purposes or a fully satisfactory theoretical account. Terminology as proposed by Jakobson and other scholars should help to improve the way we understand and talk about translation and its variables, and it must be updated accordingly as more efficient alternative terms are developed.

Table 1.
Inter-, intra-, and multi- translation operations at various levels

Operation ($\mapsto$): Level	Inter- / across	Intra- / within	Multi- / mix
Language	$L1 \mapsto L2^*$	$L1 \mapsto L1^*$	$(\text{multi-})L \mapsto (\text{multi-})L$
Mode	$M1 \mapsto M2$	$M1 \mapsto M1$	$(\text{multi-})M \mapsto (\text{multi-})M$
Sign system	$S1 \mapsto S2^*$	$S1 \mapsto S1$ isosemiotic	$(\text{complex})S \mapsto (\text{complex})S$ potentially isosemiotic
Texts	$T1 \mapsto T2$	$T1 \mapsto T1$	$\text{multi-}T (T1+T3) \mapsto T2$
* From Jakobson's three-type proposal (1959)			

If we bring in the modality factor, we can presume the existence of *monomodality* in opposition to *multimodality*, just as a monolingual (L1 or L2) text stands in opposition to a multilingual (multi-L) text. Moreover, if we now apply the *inter-*, *intra-*, *multi-* possibilities, we can propose *intramodal* translation $M1 \mapsto M1$, i.e. solutions that stay within the same mode of expression. An example could be courtroom interpreting (L1speech $\mapsto$ L2speech) or a translated subpoena (L1writing $\mapsto$ L2writing).

Intermodal translation is also proposed, in which translation solutions in one mode respond to problems posed in a different mode, $M1 \mapsto M2$. Here, we might suggest intonation in speech expressed by means of punctuation in writing, as we may see in subtitling.

Multimodal translation, (multi-)M $\mapsto$ (multi-)M, is proposed here as a combination of more than one mode in either T1 or T2. An example of this might be to combine dubbing and subtitling in T2 in response to a given T1 problem (like multilingualism or humour).

In summary, we can expand upon the original claim by Jakobson (1959) just to show its coherence problems, and by following the initial proposal to its logical conclusion. We are thus not necessarily endorsing it until it proves its applicability, but its internal logic gains coherence and consistency with these additional observations.

From the considerations summed up in Table 1, *translation* is a textual operation involving one source text (T1), or more than one (multi-T or T1+T3), and resulting in a target text or translation (T2). An update of Jakobson's *interlingual* claim is to say that prototypical, real-life, foreign-language translation, as performed by translators (human, computer-assisted or otherwise) is a $T1 \mapsto T2$ textual operation, largely characterised by L1 and L2, where other textual levels and features must also be considered to provide a full account. A modern-day example of T1+T3 dynamics (Zabalbeascoa 2024, *Chapter 1*) can be seen in audiovisual translation practices involving pivot languages, enabling or forcing the translator to depend on two sources, to varying degrees. Operations involving changing, adapting or maintaining languages, modes or semiotic systems are understood to occur within the textual dimension. An important dimension of verbal expression (for the purpose of translation or its analysis) is its paraverbal dimension and its associated factors (the aural or visual impact of words uttered or written). If language (including intralingual and interlingual) is only meant to refer to the semantics and morphosyntax of words, then we are missing an important dimension of operations, problems and solutions that needs to be accounted for: the paraverbal or paralinguistic features of those words for each text, how they are selected and used with the words they express, and how they combine with any non-verbal elements within a multimodal text.

We might conclude this section by claiming that as textual communication, translations may involve many dimensions and features, the semiotic dimension being one of them. Some texts and translation projects are more *semiotically complex* (Zabalbeascoa 2025) than others and we would do well to explore theoretical alterna-

tives, or more refined approaches, to the notion of intersemiotic translation, including the potential advantages of a term like *isosemiotic translation* (Gottlieb 2005) for many cases of dubbing, at least, where AVT involves $AV \mapsto AV$, and to recognise that some texts are *semiotically complex* (e.g. cinematography) whereas others are not (most traffic signs).

4. Updating priorities and restrictions for AI prompts

A model of priorities and restrictions (P-R model) to account for translation phenomena was presented in the 1990s (e.g. Zabalbeascoa 1999). Its potential theoretical relevance today is the way it relates to the notion of AI “prompts”. Prompts, understood as a means of requesting information or other results from AI chatbots, are similar in many respects to certain ways of verbalising the priorities and restrictions of a given translation project. So, the degree to which this may be true would validate the P-R model in today’s world and its practical application could be to provide suggestions on how to prompt AI systems like ChatGPT. Here, we outline the key features of this model and let the readers decide for themselves.

Briefly stated, translation is regarded by the P-R model as a multidimensional operation involving an indeterminate number of variables or factors. Because of their unpredictability (in number and nature), they must be established anew for each translation project. Some of the factors can be expressed as priorities, some as restrictions. Most priorities can also be considered restrictions, to the extent that they “get in the way” of finding T2 solutions for lower-ranking priorities. Each priority is restricted by all higher-ranking priorities. Priorities are the intended goals and features (formal and functional) expected or aimed for as properties of the resulting translation project. Restrictions are any and all of the obstacles and constraints that make it difficult or impossible to reflect one or more of the priorities. Priorities reflect the hopes and expectations of what the translation will look like and what it will be able to achieve. Some priorities can be very specific and concrete (e.g. counting characters, syllables, lines or words, rhymes, strategic or accidental use of homonyms, terms to be used or avoided, format, layout, display), while others might be more general, vague or abstract (e.g. originality, creativity, impact, popularity, symbolism, bias, appeal, being engaging, evocative or provocative, or having hidden agendas). For a full recent account of the P-R model, see Zabalbeascoa (2024, *Chapter 5*). In general, we might want a translation to be funny, or more specifically, we might ask for a certain type of joke, including certain traits and features.

ChatGPT prompts are input or queries given to the model to generate a response. They serve as the guiding questions or instructions that shape the content of the texts to be generated. A good prompt is expected to be clear, concise and provide sufficient context to elicit the desired response from ChatGPT. An initial input is the Call to

Action; the prompt starts with an action word like “Write”, “Create” or “Summarise”. A further refinement involves “Add Context”, i.e. adding specific and relevant context to the task. “Add Expectations” further sets clear and direct expectations for the content, like how long it should be and what to include. The similarities with the P-R model are unequivocal.

Sometimes the best way to use ChatGPT for translation is not necessarily to go straight to a “Translate” prompt. First, the human user should have a clear idea of what sort of translation they want or the nature of the translation project. If an overall effect or feature of a translation is to be funny, the user can ask for a funny text, along with other specifications (also expressed as priorities), with no direct reference to the source text until required. They could prompt AI to write a text with features A, B, C, D, and even ask for these features to be prioritised in that order; let’s say a text explaining a certain recipe for paella in a friendly, engaging, even entertaining way, in an informal register, but also using cookery terms that are accurately and clearly explained, sometimes with analogies, and so on. The user could then go into more detail about certain steps and ingredients, following items of the source, until all the relevant features of the source text (T1) that they wish to keep in the target text (T2) are included.

Once the human translator takes over, in what we might call the final draft or post-editing stage, depending on the degree of dependency on the AI system, decisions can then be made as to which solutions offered by the AI system can be kept, which ones left out or substituted by something the human could come up with after being inspired by the AI suggestions, and which parts or features need to be put through AI again or otherwise researched or consulted in order to produce a satisfactory version or translation. Alternatively, or additionally, questions can be asked about equivalence, i.e. directly asking if certain parts of the text can be regarded as equivalents or translations.

For a text producer (writer, speaker, translator), priorities are the intended formal and functional characteristics of a text (including AI prompts). What makes a translation stand out from other forms of text production (which might also be considered as priority-driven) is that its priorities will additionally reflect the way in which one text (T2) is to be regarded as a version of another text (T1).

In the P-R model, a certain number of priorities can be stated as features of the T2, such as the following, which could also be used as AI prompts:

- Be grammatically correct
- Use British English
- Be politically correct
- Write as an expert addressing a layperson
- Do not use dated or old-fashioned forms of expression
- Write in the manner of a quality newspaper
- Avoid puns and other forms of ambiguity

None of these priorities/prompts say anything about equivalence. Nevertheless, they are required features of the T2. When relevant, we can add the information of equivalence as needed. For example, “be grammatically correct” may be a priority/prompt that comes from the fact that T1 also uses normative grammar, so there is a causal relationship of grammatical correctness between T1 and its translation. If T1 were not grammatically correct, this priority might still be present for T2 “despite” it not being a feature of T1, so equivalence on this point would be deliberately avoided. A third possibility, still operating within a framework focused on T2, is that grammatical correctness may constitute an explicit goal irrespective of the degree of grammaticality or ungrammaticality of T1. In such cases, certain translation priorities are maintained without any corresponding notion of equivalence on the relevant features. This typically occurs when strong social norms in the target-culture environment determine the acceptability of T2 as a text. Examples include expectations relating to political correctness, the avoidance of blasphemy and other taboos, as well as prevailing trends, traditions, and established practices. Of course, if T1 is in Italian and T2 in British English, then the specification “use British English” is not a priority to be found in T1 but only in T2, even when the more general prompt of “be grammatically correct” is regarded as a feature of equivalence. When no solution can be found that will simultaneously account for all goals initially established for T2, the translator can decide which characteristics have priority over which others. In other words, P-sets are organised as hierarchies, to justify and account for what is lost, gained, omitted, added, substituted, and compensated for.

A further feature that the P–R model shares with AI prompting concerns the extent to which a given textual element is intended to influence the text as a whole. The P–R model originally envisioned a distinction between local and global priorities, such that a translator could want or plan for a given feature (e.g. humour) only at the beginning or end of the text (i.e. local), or as a general recurrent trait (i.e. global).

T2 sets of priorities do not always mirror T1 priorities. There may be differences in nature (not the same ones), number (more or fewer), or rank. *Ambition* and *subjectivity* are concepts arising from this observation. *Ambition* focuses on how many priorities there are, while *subjectivity* focuses on the differences between T1 and T2 sets of priorities.

Table 2 provides a summary of the parameters of priorities, raising important questions about the nature of each priority, individually and taken all together as a set.

Table 2.
Parameters of priorities, separately and as a set

Source	e.g. client, employer, laws, community
Rank	importance: e.g. high—low—bottom—banned
Level	verbal, paraverbal, semiotic, discursive, textual
Range	local (in parts) or global (throughout the text)
Function	e.g. pragmatic, stylistic, aesthetic, norm-defying
Form	e.g. layout, rhyme, word count, to aid sensorial perception, to aid intellectual comprehension
T1→T2 Equivalence	intended (as in T1), to be avoided (unlike T1), indifferent (regardless of T1)
Appropriateness	feasibility and suitability to context

5. Examples of areas for establishing priorities

(1) Information load

- (i) amount and type. Density and distribution
- (ii) explicit vs implicit
- (iii) ranking position of information and content on the hierarchy vs other Ps
- (iv) new vs known information

(2) Decoding and text-processing

How important is it that the text be immediately understandable and unambiguous in its intention and/or in its meaning (e.g. road signs vs metaphysical poetry)?

(3) Text-user response. General or specific public

Is it meant to be immediate or delayed? What is the degree of coaxing and hoaxing?

(4) Aesthetic elements (related to text-user response)

Is the text, or any part of it, artistic, or are the aesthetic elements aimed at achieving other priorities, e.g. alliteration in terminology?

(5) Formal aspects, genre, discourse, register

Text-type membership traits. What aspects are involved and how are they related to the text's functions (rhyme, repetition, word count, letter size, use of colours, etc.), including paraverbal and non-verbal features and items?

As for *difficulty*, a T1→T2 translation project becomes more difficult if there are more priorities. Higher ranking, i.e. *ambition*, as defined above, is a measure of difficulty. Additionally, the greater the number and force of the restrictions, the more difficult it will be for translators to fully satisfy expectations (including the translator's own limitations as restrictions). And for *quality*, a T2 is better the more it meets its evaluation criteria, which are variable and contingent. It all depends on the expectations

for the T2. Evaluative criteria may (or may not) include *ambition* and *subjectivity*. An important point is that a T2 product can be evaluated by criteria such as performance, execution, and excellence, but it is also possible—and often desirable and necessary—to evaluate the set of priorities chosen. I may think the jokes in a translation (product) are good in their own right, but I may also consider that jokes should not have been included in the set of priorities. Conversely, I may commend a trainee translator for being aware of the need to include the use of slang in a translation, but I may frown upon the solutions found to reflect this priority. This also means that translators, particularly highly skilled literary translators, may be unfairly criticised for their work if critics disagree with the priorities underlying the translation project rather than with the translator's success in implementing those priorities.

6. Concluding remarks

The hope expressed in this paper is for AI to be a testing ground for the validity of theoretical proposals, models or, more narrowly, terms or concepts. The challenge lies in thinking of a series of prompts that could further validate theories that have been around for a while or explore ways of improving their internal logic or updating them considering more recent discoveries, or to see how they can complement other theoretical proposals. Such theories could be Vermeer's (1978) *skopos* theory, which seems like a particularly suitable candidate, given its close relationship to the P-R model. Toury's (1995) norm theory is also highly compatible and likely to do well, with the possible exception of some of its least well-argued points, such as the distinction between adequate and acceptable. In general, we could hypothesise that straightforward dichotomies would probably struggle. This kind of reappraisal would provide validation for some theories, suggestions for improvement or development for others, while some would be invalidated.

Furthermore, people who are enthusiastic about the “new dawn” of the AI era may be brought to realise that some of the things they have just discovered about the complexities of translation (i.e. that it is much more than just matching lexical equivalents across languages) are not new and nor are they dependent upon the existence of AI. Many are issues that have been addressed and, in some cases, quite satisfactorily answered by scholars whose contributions should be acknowledged. This is just as important for TS scholars like Vermeer (1978) and Toury (1995) as for productive theoretical contributions from other areas and disciplines, like de Beaugrande (1981) in text linguistics, or many of the findings in discourse analysis, accessibility, media studies and so on. From a theoretical perspective, we must be on the lookout for new terms that may quickly become popular and affect the core questions of translation, its definition or nature, its boundaries, its classifications, its alternatives. After all, any theory has core terminology made up of interrelated terms

and definitions. Either that or we need to acknowledge that we have significant holes in the system and work from that basis.

This is the way Toury (1995) worked, for example, by stating that research into translation should start from “assumed translations”, i.e. researchers assume that a text is a translation based on what society accepts or at some point accepted as translation products or processes. From such empirical evidence, scholars can gradually develop a definition that will eventually cover all translation phenomena. One advantage of AI prompting is that the person doing the prompting has no obligation to ask for a “translation”. Because translations often respond to specific practical needs or interests, an alternative to getting AI to do a translation for you is to feed it with all the specifications (features) for the type of text you want, as in “I want a text in this language, with this kind of design, for this kind of audience, for this purpose, and I want it be like this other text according to features X, Y, Z (and maybe even *unlike* the text for features A, B, C)”. Whether that amounts to asking for a translation or an adaptation, transcreation or localisation should not worry practitioners (whether they consider themselves translators, transcreators, writers or something else) as much as the exact nature of the specifications of the project, a bit like giving all of the specifications of a whale (size, habitat, behaviour) as the target of what you wish to photograph, without knowing or worrying about whether or not it is a fish.

What is worrying is that certain terminological trends may foster a narrow, “caricatured” definition of translation that harms professional translators’ legitimate aspirations for respect and recognition, their agency, and their authorship, and does not contribute to a serious academic discussion. In this sense, we must reject (from academia or from the industry) weak arguments for translation versus transposition, or ill-defined distinctions between translation and adaptation when we know that historically and empirically, translation has regularly embraced many different kinds of creativity and manipulation in adjusting to personal or social needs and agendas (Lefevere 1992). I would argue that definitions of translation must encompass the whole range of different processes, strategies and products attributed to translators, what they are instructed and expected to do, and have done over the years, unless and until a narrower definition can be sustained with strong, convincing and well-documented arguments. In academia, we should also remain mindful of vested interests and of the limited critical attention sometimes paid to the terminology scholars employ.

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