

Capturing the Cultural Essence of Saudi Poetry through Artificial Intelligence: A Case Study of Selected Poems by Ibrahim Khafaji

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Abstract: Aligning with the Ministry of Culture’s vision of promoting Saudi national art and identity, this study offers a literary-cultural evaluation of two approaches for translating two poems by Ibrahim Khafaji: the Saudi national anthem, “Hasten”, written in formal Arabic, and the love poem titled, “I See You Every Day, Then Leave”, written in informal Arabic. The study examines the translations of the poetry from Arabic to English using Google Translate and Google Gemini and ChatGPT (AI tools). Results indicate that AI is more effective in conveying the cultural essence of the poems, although both Gemini and ChatGPT surpassed Google Translate in delivering reliable translations, ChatGPT provided the most acceptable models from both poetic and cultural perspectives. The inaccuracy in translation models can be corrected through collaboration with human translators to ensure maximum accuracy. Despite being regarded as a national and cultural icon, English-language scholarly articles have neglected promoting Khafaji’s works outside the Middle East. Therefore, this study aids in the international promotion of Saudi poetry by using AI translation. The study’s originality lies in highlighting the value of Saudi poetry and the utility of AI in facilitating the translation and global dissemination of Saudi poetry.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Culture, Ibrahim Khafaji, Saudi Poetry, Translation.

استيحاء الجوهر الثقافي للشعر السعودي من خلال الذكاء الاصطناعي: دراسة حالة لقصائد مختارة

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ملخص البحث: تماشياً مع رؤية وزارة الثقافة في تعزيز الفن والهوية الوطنية السعودية، تُقدم هذه الدراسة تقييماً أدبياً وثقافياً لمنهجين لترجمة قصيدتين للشاعر إبراهيم خفاجي: النشيد الوطني السعودي "سارعي" المكتوبة بالفصحى، وقصيدة الحب "أشوفك كل يوم وأروح" المكتوبة بالعامية. تقارن الدراسة بين ترجمتي القصيدة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية باستخدام ترجمة جوجل وجوجل جيميني وتشات جي بي تي (أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي). تشير النتائج إلى أن الذكاء الاصطناعي أكثر فعالية في نقل الجوهر الثقافي للقصائد، فرغم تفوق كل من جيميني وتشات جي بي تي على ترجمة جوجل في تقديم ترجمات موثوقة، إلا أن تشات جي بي تي قدّم النماذج الأكثر قبولاً من المنظورين الشعري والثقافي. يمكن تصحيح القصور في نماذج الترجمة من خلال التعاون مع مترجمين بشريين لضمان أقصى قدر من الدقة. على الرغم من اعتبار خفاجي رمزاً وطنياً وثقافياً، إلا أن المقالات الأكاديمية باللغة الإنجليزية لم تعنى بالترويج لأعماله خارج الشرق الأوسط. لذلك، تُسهم هذه الدراسة في الترويج الدولي للشعر السعودي باستخدام ترجمة الذكاء الاصطناعي. وتكمن أصالة الدراسة في إلقاء الضوء على قيمة الشعر السعودي وفائدة الذكاء الاصطناعي في تسهيل ترجمة الشعر السعودي ونشره عالمياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، الثقافة، إبراهيم خفاجي، الشعر السعودي، الترجمة.

Introduction

This study adheres to the Ministry of Culture's mission to advance Saudi national identity and art.⁽¹⁾ It attempts to highlight the cultural value of two well-known poems by Ibrahim Khafaji (1926–2017): the love ballad “I See You Every Day, Then Leave,” written in informal Arabic, and the Saudi national anthem “Hasten,” written in formal Arabic. The study promotes these iconic literary works by comparing their translations performed using two approaches—artificial intelligence (AI) and Google Translate.

Born and raised in Makkah, the holy city known for its cultural diversity, Khafaji served the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in multiple governmental positions, including the Ministry of Hajj and Ministry of Agriculture. During his lifetime and even after his death, he was regarded as a Saudi national and cultural icon with hundreds of memorable published lyrics. Known for his love of music and his receptivity to different cultures, he was given the privilege of writing the words for the Saudi National Anthem in 1984. His efforts to enrich Saudi songs and poems were appreciated by the Saudi Kings, who presented him with many prestigious awards.⁽²⁾ However, research establishing the value of Khafaji's work as part of Saudi heritage is limited. In “The Influence of Ibrahim Khafaji as Arabic Lyric Poet,” Dahami sheds light on Khafaji's love poems calling for more attention to his legacy.⁽³⁾ In another article, titled “Home in the Poetry of Saudi Arabia Poets: Ibrahim Khafaji an Example of a Distinguished Arab,” Dahami explores the notion of homeland in Khafaji's poems, providing a basic reading of the Saudi national anthem.⁽⁴⁾ However, his argument fails to illuminate the depths of Saudi roots in the context of the poem. Apart from these two articles, none of the English-written scholarly articles considered promoting the reputation of Khafaji's poems outside the Middle East. Therefore, this study focuses on the

international exposure of Saudi poetry by using AI translation. This study's originality lies in highlighting the value of Saudi poetry, particularly that of Khafaji's works, which are worthy of global attention, and its accessibility status through the use of AI. This research attempts to stimulate scholarly interest in adopting AI to facilitate the translation and subsequent promotion of Saudi poetry. It makes a meaningful contribution to the field by emphasizing how AI can effectively promote Saudi poetry worldwide. Additionally, it showcases the profound cultural importance of Khafaji's poetry in relation to Saudi national identity. Lastly, through a careful analysis of AI-driven translations, the study offers important insights into the advantages and drawbacks of these technologies when used for literary works that hold substantial cultural and historical significance.

The study begins by reviewing the current literature on the effectiveness and limitations of machine translation, providing a broad picture of the most recent scholarship in the field. Subsequently, the researcher addresses the research questions concerning the adoption of AI in the translation of the selected poems, outlines the methodology used, presents the results, and provides an analytical discussion of the different translations obtained. The study's conclusion highlights the significance of the outcomes while simultaneously considering the limitations and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Scholars have examined the efficacy of machine translation, including Google Translate, for translating various texts. Despite concerns regarding their accuracy, Katherine King argues: “It would be facile to dismiss these evolving translation tools as ‘never’ good enough for poetry or literature, despite experiments that show their current inadequacy.”⁽⁵⁾ Similarly, Matusov confronts the assumption that MT is inappropriate for literary translations.⁽⁶⁾ Other scholars have questioned the proficiency of these tools, calling for human engagement in the translation process. In her comparison of human translation and Google Translate's translation of Al-Mutanabbi's poem, AbdulGhaffar points out: “The human translation is better able to convey the

(1) MOC, “About the Ministry.” *Ministry of Culture*. Accessed 11 October 2024.
<https://www.moc.gov.sa/en/Modules/Pages/About-the-Ministry>.

(2) “The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi.” Accessed 5 November 2024.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6pojq4>

(3) Yahya Dahami, “The Influence of Ibrahim Khafaji as Arabic Lyric Poet,” *Global Scientific Journals* 9, 1 (January 2021): 1022.

(4) Yahya Dahami, “Home in the Poetry of Saudi Arabia Poets: Ibrahim Khafaji an Example of a Distinguished Arab,” *El-Hakika (the Truth): Journal for Social and Human Sciences* 22, 1 (March 2023): 469-475.

(5) Katherine King, “Can Google Translate be Taught to Translate Literature? A Case for Humanists to Collaborate in the Future of Machine Translation,” *Translation Review* 105 (November 2019): 88.

(6) Evgeny Matusov, “The Challenges of Using Neural Machine Translation for Literature,” *Proceedings of the Qualities of Literary Machine Translation*, (August 2019): 17.

holistic, meaning-based interpretation of the poem. The translator's understanding of the cultural and literary context allows for a more fluid and expressive rendition that preserves the emotional resonance and metaphorical richness of the original."⁽⁷⁾ This urge for human involvement is a result of Google Translate's inability to identify either the culture or the context of the source texts in the conducted studies. Constantine claims that if Google Translate is now surpassing expectations in its literary translations, it can still fail catastrophically (and comically) when it links but then misinterprets a series of words."⁽⁸⁾ Therefore, this research considers previous arguments to assess the accuracy of Google Translate, along with other AI-based translations, when used in the translation of Saudi poems.

Recent scholarship has also explored how AI has revolutionized the field of translation, leading to enhancements in machine translation systems. Seyidov highlights that "AI applications are revolutionizing the way Arabic content is translated, enabling more accurate and contextually relevant outputs."⁽⁹⁾ In "The Influence of AI-Based Translation Tools on the Translation of Dr. Ghazi Al-Qusaibi's poems by Saudi EFL Learners," Thabet and Qadha argue: "By making Arabic poetry more accessible to non-Arabic speakers, AI translation can foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. It can facilitate dialogue, enhance literary exchange, and serve as a bridge between diverse linguistic and cultural communities."⁽¹⁰⁾ Thabet and Qadha's study resembles the present research as it considers using AI in the translation of another model of Saudi poetry by Ghazi Al-Qusaibi. Moreover, this is in line with the most recent scholarship on the advancement of AI translation. As Karaban and Karaban conclude: "Machine

translations, powered by evolving AI technologies have made substantial progress in tackling the multifaceted challenge of poetry translation, which involves structural, linguistic, poetic, semantic, and emotional elements."⁽¹¹⁾ Similarly, Farghal and Haider discover that "GPT's assessment comes close to that of human translation in terms of thematic clarity, creativity, and prosody. This simply means that AI systems are making progress not only in translating texts written for general purposes but also for discourse produced for specific purposes, with poetry translation being viewed as the most challenging task owing to both content and form complexity."⁽¹²⁾ In another recent study, Moneus and Al-Wasy suggest: "Despite the advantages of human translation, AI can significantly enhance the translation process. AI-powered translation tools improve productivity, reduce costs, and handle large volumes of content. Additionally, AI algorithms can continually learn and improve, resulting in more accurate translations over time."⁽¹³⁾ Gao, Lin, Zhao, and Cai conclude: "Although ChatGPT still faces challenges in the accurate interpretation and translation of certain phrases and sentences, our findings showed a great potential of ChatGPT in literary translation and creative writing, shedding light on the evolving role of technology in translation, creativity, and cultural exchange."⁽¹⁴⁾ However, the existing literature includes arguments by scholars who find that AI-based translation is inaccurate, specifically when it comes to literary texts. For instance, Alowed and Al-Ahdal argue that "MT algorithms are typically designed to translate text word-for-word, which can be problematic for poetry, which often relies on the nuances and associations of words and phrases rather than their literal meanings." Additionally, they say, "while machine translation software has made significant strides in recent years, it still faces significant

(7) Nehal AbdulGhaffar, "Beyond Literal Meaning: Neural Machine Translation Constraints in Translating the Poetic Depth of Al Mutanabbi's 'Tell My Beloved,'" *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 8, 2 (2024): 373.

(8) Peter Constantine, "Google Translate Gets Voltaire: Literary Translation and the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 23, 4 (August 2019): 476.

(9) Rashad Seyidov, "Importance and Role of Artificial Intelligence for Arabic Translators," *International Journal for Arabic Linguistics and Literature Studies* 6, 2 (June 2024): 93.

(10) Mustafa Thabet and Adel Qadha, "The Influence of AI-Based Translation Tools on the Translation of Dr. Ghazi Al-Qusaibi's Poetry by Saudi EFL Learners," *Humanities & Educational Sciences Journal* 38 (April 2024): 776.

(11) Viacheslav Karaban and Anna Karaban, "AI-translated poetry: Ivan Franko's poems in GPT-3.5-driven machine and human-produced translations," *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 6, 1 (January 2024): 13.

(12) Mohammed Farghal and Ahmad Haider, "Translating Classical Arabic Verse: Human Translation vs. AI Large Language Models (Gemini and ChatGPT)," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, 1 (October 2024): 11.

(13) Ahmed Moneus and Baleigh Al-Wasy, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Quality of Saudi Translators' Performance," *Alandalus Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences* 11, 96 (June 2024): 208.

(14) Ruiyao Gao, Yumeng Lin, Nan Zhao, and Zhenguang Cai, "Machine translation of Chinese classical poetry: a comparison among ChatGPT, Google Translate, and DeepL Translator," *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* 11, 835 (June 2024): 8.

challenges in accurately translating poetry due to the nuances of the language and the complex cultural and emotional associations that are inherent in this art.”⁽¹⁵⁾ Similarly, Elseddig, Abdelmagid, Altigani, Mohamed, Ahmed, and Elhassan conclude: “In translating literary genres such as ancient Arabic poetry, machine-based translation is a questionable choice for various reasons, including linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions, as well as the specific traits of poetry.”⁽¹⁶⁾ The validity of such arguments will be assessed in the discussion section, which includes an analysis of the translation models provided by the AI software to the selected poems.

Other scholars have reported that human interference is crucial to ensure the quality of the translation provided. For example, Obeidat and Jaradat claim: “Human translators are crucial in understanding context and preserving the depth of the original work, requiring meticulous attention to linguistic nuances and underlying meanings. Thus, although AI can aid in the translation process, human involvement remains essential to ensure faithful and nuanced translation.”⁽¹⁷⁾ Similar to Obeidat and Jaradat, Rawas proposes: “Collaboration between AI and human intelligence has the potential to lead to extraordinary improvements in human skills and the resolution of complicated issues.”⁽¹⁸⁾ Omar and Gomaa highlight that “the use of machine translators provides a basic, if not, high, level of translation and furthermore, postulates quite a formidable tool for use of translation in both prose and literature. [...] Conversely, the use of human intervention, specifically, in regard to translation, can provide, evidently, the most accurate form of translation, with respect to correct translation of idioms, grammar,

and colloquial understandings.”⁽¹⁹⁾ In their comparison of human and machine translations of literary texts, AlKaabi, AlQbailat, Badah, Ismail, and Hicham find that “machine translation often interpreted the terms with cultural connotations more literally, failing to transfer the allegorical significance. In addition, the results revealed that human translation proved superior in preserving cultural connotations. Human translation was able to create associations that enriched the meaning of the proverbs.”⁽²⁰⁾ Emphasizing the significance of human involvement in the translation process, Mohammed Mohsen argues: “The implications of our findings could be particularly valuable for translator training, offering insights into how the efficiency of various translation modes can be leveraged to augment the human translation process. It is important, however, to recognize that despite advancements in LLM tools, human intervention remains crucial to refine the outputs and ensure that they accurately convey the intended meaning of the SL.”⁽²¹⁾ The current study engages with previous studies as it explores the proficiency of AI-based translations and whether human revision of the results is significant for enhancing the quality of the text in the target language.

Research Questions

Building on previous literature, the present research explores the following questions:

Q.1: Does AI represent an advancement in the translation of Saudi poetry over Google Translate?

Q.2: Can AI provide culturally integrated translations of the selected Saudi poems?

Q.3: What are the potential limitations of using AI in translating the selected Saudi poems?

Methodology

This analytical study focuses on a literary-cultural evaluation of two approaches for translating two of Khafaji’s notable poems, in both formal and

(15) Noha Alowedi and Arif Al-Ahdal, “Artificial Intelligence Based Arabic-to-English Machine Versus Human Translation of Poetry: An Analytical Study of Outcomes,” *Journal of Namibian Studies* 33, 2 (2023): 1527-1528.

(16) Mousab Elseddig, Adiel Abdelmagid, Elsadig Altigani, Yasir Mohamed, Babikir Ahmed, and Salah Elhassan, “Accuracy and Problems of Machine-Based Translation in Contrast to Human-Based Translation when Rendering Health Awareness Texts Versus Poetry Texts,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, 4 (July 2023): 230.

(17) Mohammed Obeidat and Malak Jaradat, “Artificial Intelligence Accuracy in Translating Resistance Literature from Arabic into English: Google Translate and ChatGPT as a Model,” *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 5, 2 (April 2024): 60.

(18) Soha Rawas, “AI: The Future of Humanity,” *Discover Artificial Intelligence* 4, 25 (March 2024): 2.

(19) Abdulfattah Omar and Yasser Gomaa, “The Machine Translation of Literature: Implications for Translation Pedagogy,” *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 15, 11 (June 2020): 232.

(20) Mozah AlKaabi, Naji AlQbailat, Amjad Badah, Islam Ismail, and Khalid Hicham, “Examining the Cultural Connotations in Human and Machine Translations: A Corpus Study of Naguib Mahfouz’s Zuqāq al-Midaqq,” *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 15, 3 (May 2024): 716.

(21) Mohammed Mohsen, “Artificial Intelligence in Academic Translation: A Comparative Study of Large Language Models and Google Translate,” *Psycholinguistics* 35, 2 (March 2024): 151-152.

informal Arabic, into English: the Saudi national anthem “Hasten” and the love poem titled “I See You Every Day, Then Leave.” The poems were selected for their significance and popularity in Saudi culture to explore the accuracy of AI-based translations as compared with Google Translate. The first translation model was offered by Google Translate, whereas the other two were AI-based, using both Gemini and ChatGPT, to provide a comparative perspective on how these advanced AI models handle the nuances of Saudi poetry. Each AI software program utilizes unique processing algorithms and language models, offering insights into how machine learning approaches cultural and poetic subtleties. As a poetry specialist proficient in both Arabic and English, the researcher analyzed each translation from the cultural and poetic perspectives. Given limited extant literature on the

selected poems and to ensure the evaluation’s validity, the translations underwent additional revision by two translation specialists.

Machine Translation Tables

This section lists the source Arabic texts and their English translations by Google Translate and AI, specifically Gemini and ChatGPT. Table 1 presents the data of the Saudi National anthem “Hasten,” while Table 2 illustrates the results of the love song “I See You Every Day, Then Leave.” In both tables, there are two translation models provided by AI: the first is literal translation, whereas the second model results from asking the software to consider the cultural background of the selected poems.

Table 1: Comparison of the Translations of the Saudi National Anthem “Hasten” Obtained from Google Translate and Google Gemini

Source Text	Google Translate	Model 1 of Gemini Translation	Model 2 of Gemini Translation
سارعي للمجد والعلاء مجدّي خالق السماء وارفعني الخفاق أخضر يحمل النور المسطر رددي الله أكبر يا موطني موطني عشت فخر المسلمين عاش الملك للعالم والوطن ⁽²²⁾	Hurry to glory and glory My glory to the Creator of heaven And raise the beater green Carries the underlined light Repeat, God is great, my homeland My homeland, I lived the pride of Muslims Long live the king: for science and homeland	Hasten towards glory and the highest [position] Glorify the Creator of the heavens And raise the fluttering green [flag] Carrying the inscribed light Repeat “Allah is Greatest,” O my homeland My homeland, you have lived as the pride of Muslims Long live the King: for the flag and the homeland	March forward, O nation, towards the pinnacle of glory, Exalt the Lord of the heavens, the source of our story. Raise high the emerald banner, a symbol of faith, Carrying the light of truth, dispelling all strife. Repeat, “Allah is Greatest,” our homeland’s refrain, My homeland, you’ve stood as the pride of the Muslim domain. Long live the King, a guardian of our land, Under his rule, our nation will always stand.
		Model 1 of ChatGPT Translation	Model 2 of ChatGPT Translation
		Hasten to glory and supremacy, Glorify the Creator of the heavens, And raise the green flag, Bearing the written light, Repeat: “God is the Greatest!” O my homeland, My homeland, live as the pride of Muslims, Long live the King for the flag and the nation!	Hasten to glory and high status, Honor to the Creator of the heavens, Raise the green banner with pride, Holding the light of righteousness, Echo: “God is Greatest!” O my homeland, My homeland, live as the pride of the faithful, Long live the King, for the flag and the homeland!

علي فقندش، أوراق من حياة الخفاجي (جدة: مكتبة الملك فهد الوطنية، ٢٠١٢)، ٢٣٨. (22)

Table 2: Comparison of Google Translate and AI Translation of “I See You Every Day, Then Leave”

Source Text	Google Translate	Model 1 of Gemini Translation	Model 2 of Gemini Translation
أشوفك كل يوم وأروح عسى النظرة تردّ الرّوح أعيش فيها عشان بكرأ عشان ليبي ألي كله جروح ... صحيح النظرة ما تكفي من الآلام ما تشفي ولكن عذرنا الحاضر نزاعي الوقت والخاطر وما دام النّظر مسموح أشوفك كل يوم وأروح عسى النظرة تردّ الرّوح توصّيني على الكتان وتبغى حبّنا ما بيان.. وتتسائي تقولي ودّنا صافي وتحسب حبّنا خافي تري راعي الهوى مفصوح نخاف من ايه والدّنيا.. تحاسينا على الثاني بتأخذ مِنّا الأشواق.. وتعطينا حياه ثانية يا صاحب المعنى.. ألا لو كنت تسمعنا لا الوقت يخدعنا.. نرجع ونبتغى ⁽²³⁾ ...	I see you every day and go And I say a look that returns the soul I live in it for tomorrow Because of my night which is full of wounds It's true that a look isn't enough. From pains you can't heal But our present excuse We take into account the time and the mind And as long as looking is allowed I see you every day and go May the look return the soul You recommend me to keep quiet And you want our love to never be revealed. and forget about me You tell me our ears are pure And you think our love is hidden You see the shepherd of love exposed What are we afraid of? Pay us for the second It takes our longings from us. And give us a second life O owner of meaning. If you can hear us No, time deceives us. We go back and mean	I see you daily, then depart, Each glance rekindles hope in my heart. I live for tomorrow, for nights so sore, For moments of joy to forevermore. A glance alone cannot mend my pain, But it offers solace, again and again. For now, this is all we can bear, Respecting time and each other's care. As long as our gazes meet, I'll see you daily, it's sweet. Hoping your glance will soothe my soul, You ask me to hide, to keep it all whole. You claim our love is pure and deep, Yet fear its exposure, want it to sleep. But lovers' hearts are easily seen, What do we fear, when the world's unseen? Time takes our longing, gives life anew, Oh, friend of my heart, if you only knew. Time cannot deceive, we'll return to you.	I see you, a mirage in the desert's sand, A fleeting glimpse, a hope I can't command. Each day I yearn, for nights of endless pain, A lover's heart, a prisoner of chains. A glance alone cannot heal this wound, But it's a balm, a solace to be found. For now, we wait, beneath the desert sky, Respecting fate, and love's sweet lie. As long as our eyes meet, a stolen spark, I'll see you daily, though my heart may break. A lover's gaze, a secret deep and true, You ask me to hide, what else can I do? You claim our love is pure, a hidden gem, Yet fear its exposure, like a diadem. But lovers' hearts are known, a secret shared, What do we fear, when love's the only card? Time takes our longing, gives life a new hue, Oh, friend of my soul, if only you knew. Time cannot deceive, our love will endure.
		Model 1 of ChatGPT Translation	Model 2 of ChatGPT Translation
		I see you every day, then leave, Telling myself a glance will restore my soul. I live in that moment, waiting for tomorrow, For my nights are all filled with wounds. True, a glance isn't enough, It doesn't heal the pain, But it's all we have now. We respect the time and the situation. As long as looking is allowed, I'll see you every day, then go, Hoping the glance revives my spirit. You urge me to keep it secret, You want our love to stay hidden... then forget me. You say our desires are pure, And think our love remains concealed. But you know, a lover can't hide— What are we afraid of? Life judges us by each second. It'll take our longing, only to give us a second life. O bearer of these emotions, if you can hear me, Don't let time deceive us. Let us return and cherish each other.	I see you each day, then go my way, Hoping a glance might revive my soul. I live for those moments, for tomorrow, For nights that ache with wounds untold. A glance, I know, isn't enough— It cannot cure the pain inside. But we respect the present boundaries, We honor time, we guard our pride. As long as a look is all that's allowed, I'll see you each day, then go my way, Praying that glance might restore my soul. You ask me to keep it all hidden away, To keep our love from seeing the light... then forget me. You say our bond is pure and deep, Yet think our love must stay concealed. But don't you know? A lover's heart shows— Why should we fear? Life's seconds judge us. It takes our longing, only to grant us a life reborn. O keeper of meaning, if you hear me, Let not the moment fool us now. Let us return, seeking what we cherish most.

Discussion

This study shows that translations produced by AI, particularly Gemini and ChatGPT, are notably better than those from Google Translate when translating both the formal Saudi national anthem and the informal love poem by Khafaji. These findings align with Farghal and Haider's assertion that AI is making significant progress in translating poetry, a notoriously challenging domain.⁽²⁴⁾ In this study, AI's translation quality is evaluated by comparing the translations from Google Translate with those obtained from Gemini and ChatGPT. According to Khafaji, composing the lyrics of the Saudi anthem took him six months, as he carefully considered both the values and governance approach central to the Kingdom.⁽²⁵⁾ For over forty years, the anthem's lyrics have been recited by generations in local schools and at various events, symbolizing national heritage. Using apostrophes to address the homeland, the poem conveys patriotic pride through words like "العلياء" and "السَاء," which evoke themes

of passion and lofty aspirations. These connotations are further reflected in the music and the rhyming patterns of the source text. The speaker urges the homeland to "raise the green flag," symbolizing justice and the Islamic principles inherent in the first pillar of Islam. The green flag carries additional significance, often associated with growth and closely tied to Saudi national identity worldwide. Despite its brevity, the poem is distinguished by its rich meanings, reflecting the history and principles of Saudi culture. While it refrains from referencing specific kings or political groups, it calls for unity and dedication to both the flag and the homeland.

As presented in Table 1, Google Translate provided a mere literal translation of the Saudi anthem with notable major errors. There is an evident dismissal of some lexical terms in the source text; for example, it mistranslates the addressee implied in the word "مجدّي" to the possessive pronoun "My glory." The same error occurs in the translation of the word "عشّيت" which is translated to "I lived." Redundancy of the word "glory"—as a

direct translation of the words "للمجد والعلياء"—

demonstrates a further limitation of Google Translate as it failed to find appropriate synonyms of patriotic vocabularies in Arabic. Other major errors appear in the literal translation of words such as "الحنّاق" translated to "beater," "النور المسطر"

translated to "underlined light," and "للعلم"

translated to "science," marking a shift from the intended meanings in the original Arabic text. Furthermore, Google Translate considered neither the rhythm nor the rhyme scheme in the translation from Arabic to English. Therefore, the findings presented herein resemble the observations of Constantine, who noted that Google Translate "can still fail catastrophically" in translating certain literary texts.⁽²⁶⁾

However, Table 1 demonstrates that AI-based translations overcame some of the errors seen in Google Translate. Gemini's first model resulted from asking it to provide an English translation of the Saudi anthem. Although it was not given any further instructions, its translation demonstrated a higher level of accuracy than the one offered by Google Translate. For example, the line "My homeland, you have lived as the pride of Muslims" addresses the "homeland" correctly, unlike Google Translate which misinterpreted the pronoun as "I lived." Another example is the translation of the word "flag" in the last line which was mistranslated by Google Translate as "science" owing to the different pronunciation of the word "علم" in Arabic.

This depicts AI's ability to contextualize a given text even when it is not properly trained, recalling the views of Thabet and Qadha, who proposed that AI-driven translation tools enhance cross-cultural understanding by making Arabic poetry more accessible.⁽²⁷⁾ Gemini also provides refined vocabularies, such as "Hasten towards glory" instead of "Hurry to glory." It avoids the repetition of the word "glory," which is evident in the initial model by Google Translate. The only similarity Gemini shares with Google Translate is that it did not

(24) Mohammed Farghal and Ahmad Haider, "Translating Classical Arabic Verse: Human Translation vs. AI Large Language Models (Gemini and ChatGPT)," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, 1 (October 2024): 11.

(25) "The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi," accessed November 5, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6pojq4>

(26) Peter Constantine, "Google Translate Gets Voltaire: Literary Translation and the Age of Artificial Intelligence," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 23, 4 (August 2019): 476.

(27) Mustafa Thabet and Adel Qadha, "The Influence of AI-Based Translation Tools on the Translation of Dr. Ghazi Al-Qusaibi's Poetry by Saudi EFL Learners," *Humanities & Educational Sciences Journal* 38 (April 2024): 776.

consider the rhyme scheme in the first model. However, in the second model, when Gemini was asked to provide a culturally oriented translation, the lines appeared intricate in their structure and rhyme scheme. Rhyming words, such as “glory/ story” and “refrain/ domain,” appear in the second translation. A more poetic style was adopted from the first line which was translated as “March forward, O nation, towards the pinnacle of glory,” thereby refining the traditional translation in the first model “Hasten towards glory and the highest.” As evident in Table 1, the second model by Gemini eschews word-to-word translation and creates images that identify cultural symbolism, echoing Saudi national pride and heritage. It identifies the Lord as “the source of our story” and recognizes the flag as “a symbol of faith,” reflecting Islamic beliefs which rule the legalization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This appreciation of the Saudi culture also appears in the last line where the King is referred to as “a guardian of our land,/ Under his rule, our nation will always stand.” This translation is more elaborate than Gemini’s first model. In the first model, “عاش الملك

والعلم والوطن” is translated literally to “Long live the King: for the flag and the homeland.” While not explicitly present in the source text, the reference to the “guardian” of the land resonates with the Islamic concept of guardianship and reflects the Kingdom’s governance structure, as noted by Khafaji in his reflections on composing the anthem.⁽²⁸⁾ Despite Gemini’s effort to consider the anthem’s cultural sentiment, a better and more direct translation could replace certain terms, such as “the emerald banner,” for instance, which implies “the green flag.” Additionally, ethical concerns may arise from adding details that cannot be found in the source text to create rhyming words. Thus, as Obeidat and Jaradat suggested, human interference is “essential to ensure faithful and nuanced translation.”⁽²⁹⁾

Furthermore, ChatGPT was used in this study to explore the effectiveness of AI-based translation over Google Translate. As presented in the first model in Table 1, ChatGPT was given the same Arabic text and asked to simultaneously provide an English translation. As with Gemini’s translation,

ChatGPT exceeded Google Translate, even in literal translations. None of the lexical or grammatical errors detected in Google Translate appeared in ChatGPT. A comparison of the first models of translation by Gemini and ChatGPT shows that ChatGPT is more accurate in punctuation, as each line is followed by a comma to ensure the flow of thoughts and avoid sentence fragments. However, in the second model, when the software was asked to consider the cultural background in the translation of the Saudi anthem, ChatGPT made minor changes to the first model. Unlike Gemini’s second model, which was apparently longer, ChatGPT enhanced some word choices to reflect Saudi patriotism. For instance, the line “Raise the green banner with pride” adds the word “pride,” which does not exist in the source text, to adhere to the given order of considering the cultural background of the anthem. Owing to its attempt to consider the Saudi culture, ChatGPT also replaced the word “Muslims” with “faithful” in the second model. This replacement indicates that the software must be trained and directed by humans as the term “faithful” is broader and not as accurate as “Muslims” in the given context. “النور المسطر” is also literally translated as

“the written light,” demonstrating the software’s inconsideration of the target language. For English speakers, interpreting the implied meaning of this term as Islam’s first pillar, Shahadah, is challenging. In general, ChatGPT performed better than Google Translate and Gemini in translating the Saudi national anthem, which is an example of a formal Arabic poem.

As in Table 1, Table 2 illustrates the results provided by the same software in translating Khafaji’s love poem “I See You Every Day, Then Leave.” Despite the difference in both the background and language style of the selected poems—the first, a formal patriotic text, and the second, an informal love poem—Google Translate proved its deficiency in conveying the meanings of the original text. In a 2014 interview with the Rotana TV network, Khafaji revealed that he wrote songs for personal expression, often inspired by his experiences of love and heartache. In the same interview, he recalls a real-life event that inspired this particular song, describing a lover who frequently visited a car maintenance workshop simply to gaze at the woman he was in love with, who lived next to the shop.⁽³⁰⁾ Khafaji did not

(28) “The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi,” accessed November 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6poj4>

(29) Mohammed Obeidat and Malak Jaradat, “Artificial Intelligence Accuracy in Translating Resistance Literature from Arabic into English: Google Translate and ChatGPT as a Model,” *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 5, 2 (April 2024): 60.

(30) “The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi,” accessed November 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6poj4>

disclose the identity of the lover, and it remains unclear whether the story reflects a personal experience. The poem is widely popular among Saudi and Gulf citizens, having been performed by the renowned artist Mohammed Abdu (1949 – present). Unlike the anthem's formal and powerful tone, this song is characterized by its informal Hejazi dialect and evocative imagery of sacrificial love. As shown in the source text in Table 2, many lines rhyme with the word “الروح” (meaning “soul” in English), adding a delicate, emotional quality to the poem. Notably, the male lover's perspective dominates the song, with the female beloved's voice heard only indirectly, as she asks him to keep their relationship a secret. This reflects the societal norms concerning women at the time. The protective tone can also be seen as aligned with Khafaji's values which respect women and avoid using decadent language in love songs.⁽³¹⁾

As with the translation of the anthem by Google Translate, applying the same tool to translate the love poem reveals major errors that not only fail to reflect the context of the source text but also change the entire meaning, reminding us of Constantine's observation about the deficiency of Google Translate when applied to literary texts.⁽³²⁾ The line “نراعي الوقت والخطر” is incorrectly translated as “We take into account the time and the mind.”

Another mistake appears when the line “تقولي ودنا” is translated as “You tell me our ears are pure,” distorting the actual meaning. The translation of the word “ودنا” to “ears” shows the incompetence of Google Translate in identifying some Arabic terms; it misread the word as “أذننا.” Another major mistake exists in the translation of “تري راعي الهوى” to “You see the shepherd of love exposed.”

This line marks the software's inability to address local meanings. Moreover, as in the translation of the national anthem, Google Translate misidentified pronouns while translating Arabic to English. The

translation of the last two words in the source text “نرجع ونتعنى” to “We go back and mean” is of significance as it validates the previous claim on the incapability of Google Translate to accurately depict the images and implications in the selected Saudi poems. The examples above reveal that Google Translate even failed to consider the target language, with a lack of flow in thoughts and incoherence in the sentence structure.

More refined results were seen in the AI-based translation of the same love poem. As is the case with the national anthem, Gemini's first model surpassed Google Translate on multiple levels. It divided the poem into rhyming couplets and a concluding triplet to imitate the musical nature of the original text by providing an appropriate rhyme scheme through words like “depart/ heart” and “sore/ forevermore.” Although the provided translations are generally reliable, there are occasions where Gemini diverges from the meaning of the source poem. For instance, the line “نراعي

الوقت والخطر” is translated as “Respecting time and each other's care” dismissing the context of secrecy implied in the poem. It is also noteworthy that Gemini provided different translations of the same line “أشوفك كل يوم وأروح” possibly to conform to the rhyming conventions. While at first it is translated as “I see you daily, then depart,” the second time the line is translated as “I'll see you daily, it's sweet.” This variation results in inaccurate detection of the intended meaning. In the second model, when Gemini was asked to provide another translation that considered the poem's cultural background, a more complex translation appeared. The division of the lines and the rhyme scheme did not change in the second model of translation, as in the first model, which adhered to rhyming couplets and a concluding triplet. Images that are associated with Saudi heritage and landscape, such as “desert's sand” and “desert sky,” occurred in this model to engage with the context of the poem. As with the translation of the national anthem, Gemini's second model adds details not found in the source text in an attempt to respond to the command to appreciate the work's cultural background. These additions resulted in an extra number of lines in the English translation and some changes from declarative to interrogative sentences. For instance, the line “توصيني على الكتان/ وتبغى حينا ما بيان” is incorrectly translated as “You ask me to hide, what else can I

(31) “The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi,” accessed November 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6pojq4>

(32) Peter Constantine, “Google Translate Gets Voltaire: Literary Translation and the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 23, 4 (August 2019): 476.

do?” using a rhetorical question to attract readers’ attention. However, the invention of such images and poetic techniques puts under question the ethical motives behind the translation process, which should transfer meanings as they are.

ChatGPT consistently outperformed both Google Translate and Gemini in translating the love poem, maintaining greater accuracy in conveying the nuances of the informal Hejazi dialect and the underlying emotional tone. This aligns with Khafaji’s description of the poem’s inspiration—a real-life encounter that deeply affected him.⁽³³⁾ In Table 2, both models by ChatGPT did not consider following a particular rhyme scheme but remained closer to the source text. The translation of the first line in model 1 “أشوفك كل يوم وأروح” to “I see you every day, then leave” seems to be the most accurate among all other models. Additionally, the translation of “نراعي الوقت والخاطر” to “We respect the time and the situation” conforms to the overall sense of secrecy implied in the original text, which was dismissed by other models. Despite maintaining consistency in this model by ChatGPT, considering the target language would enhance the translation provided. For example, the translation of “وأقول نظره” to “Telling myself a glance will restore my soul” does not work well and would work better with other synonyms like “relief” instead of “restore.” The same applies to the line “تقول لي ودنا” which is translated as “You say our desires are pure.” As the word “desires” has different connotations in English, the term “love” makes a more accurate replacement here. Such replacements by human interference are also required in the second ChatGPT model, which had already been asked to consider the cultural background of the selected poem. Despite its reliability in translating most parts of the poem, the software mistranslated certain lines. For example, “نخاف من ايه والدنيا..” was translated as “Why should we fear? Life’s seconds judge us.” The source text implies that life judges us, not its seconds. Similarly, the literal translation “keeper of meaning” appears

for “يا صاحب المعنى” complicating the readers’ understanding in the target language, for the speaker in the source text addresses his beloved as the intended person rather than “keeper of meaning.”

To answer the present research questions, AI certainly represents an advancement in the translation of Saudi poetry over Google Translate. However, although AI can grasp and convey sentiments and ideas rooted in the Saudi culture, this ability is underdeveloped at the current stage. To obtain culturally integrated translations from AI, intervention by human translators is necessary, reinforcing Rawas’s argument that such involvement would lead to advanced results.⁽³⁴⁾ Overall, AI tools have a limited ability to capture nuances and emotions, adding details not present in the source text, and potentially distorting the original meaning. However, these shortcomings could be overcome in the future through refinement and further training.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the findings presented herein are novel and of particular significance to the existing literature, the study offers limited insights owing to its focus on only two types of poems. A larger selection of other contemporary Saudi poems would enhance our understanding of both the effectiveness and the limitations of employing AI in translating poems. Moreover, including professional human translators in research studies would be helpful, as they would enrich the research by minutely evaluating and correcting the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of AI-based translations.

Conclusion

The present study’s findings add a new case study to the existing literature on the effectiveness of AI-based translations of literary texts. These results reveal the advancement of AI over Google Translate in appreciating the cultural ethos of the selected poems. Although both Gemini and ChatGPT surpassed Google Translate in delivering reliable translations, ChatGPT provided the most acceptable models from both the poetic and cultural perspectives. This study also showed that Gemini and ChatGPT translated poems written in formal Arabic better than those written in informal Arabic. The inaccuracy detected in translation models can be enhanced through the collaboration of human translators to ensure maximum accuracy. Such collaboration may include additional machine

(33) “The poet Ibrahim Khafaji: An Interview with Mohammed Alkhamisi,” accessed November 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJvx6pojq4>

(34) Soha Rawas, “AI: The Future of Humanity,” *Discover Artificial Intelligence* 4, 25 (March 2024): 2.

training to obtain refined results. By using different translation tools on two of Khafaji's poems, this study aims to illuminate the value of such tools in expanding the reach of Saudi poems to the global audience. It also seeks to encourage commentators to shed light on Khafaji's poetry, which is worthy of further attention.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was declared by the author.

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