

Washington University in St. Louis

## Washington University Open Scholarship

---

Generative AI Teaching Activities

Center for Teaching and Learning

---

Spring 4-4-2024

### Traduttore, Traditore: A Comparative Translation Activity

Katherine Tilghman

Washington University in St. Louis, k.a.tilghman@wustl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/ai\\_teaching](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/ai_teaching)



Part of the [Language Interpretation and Translation Commons](#), [Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Translation Studies Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Tilghman, Katherine, "Traduttore, Traditore: A Comparative Translation Activity" (2024). *Generative AI Teaching Activities*. 4.

[https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/ai\\_teaching/4](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/ai_teaching/4)

This Teaching Material is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Teaching and Learning at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Generative AI Teaching Activities by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact [digital@wumail.wustl.edu](mailto:digital@wumail.wustl.edu).

## *Traduttore, Traditore: A Comparative Translation Activity*

**Summary:** Students will translate a paragraph-long passage, then ask ChatGPT to translate the same passage. Students will then compare and evaluate the two translations.

**Digital tools used:** ChatGPT 3.5, ChatGPT 4 (optional), Google Translate (optional)

**Format:** This activity is potentially adaptable to in-class, out-of-class, group work, or individual work scenarios, as well as to a variety of language courses. Duration is also flexible based on the length of the excerpt and on how many discussion questions are included.

### **Learning Objectives:**

Students will:

- Demonstrate their ability to translate a paragraph-long passage into English.
- Deepen their understanding of the possibilities and limitations of AI/machine translation.
- Analyze translations according to a variety of factors and concepts, which could include context, tone, humor, domestication and foreignization, slang, and bilingualism.
- Gain a better understanding of the difference made by prompt wording as they compare the results ChatGPT produces when given slightly different prompts.

### **Example Procedure:**

1. Present students with the excerpt to be translated. If the excerpt is from a video, first show them that section of the video to better convey the intended tone.
2. Show or hand out the fully transcribed excerpt. Give students a minute to read it over and then ask students to write their own translation of the excerpt.
3. Students discuss in pairs what the translation experience was like. Possible discussion questions:
  - a. What was difficult about it and why? Which parts were hardest to translate? Which parts of your translation are you most uncertain about?
  - b. How is your partner's approach to these challenges similar or different from yours?
  - c. Which of you has the more literal translation, and who took more liberties?
  - d. Do you think elements of your own personality or sense of humor made their way into the translation? How?
4. Have students prompt ChatGPT to translate the same excerpt.
  - a. Refrain from giving direction on how to prompt it, but encourage them to use a single prompt to elicit the best result possible.
  - b. **Optional:** first, have them paste the text into Google Translate (or other websites like SpanishDict, Reverso, etc.). Later, they can compare this translation to ChatGPT's.
  - c. **Optional:** after ChatGPT translates the text, have students ask it to provide an explanation of its reasoning or choices.
  - d. Assume students only have access to the free version of ChatGPT, although if someone has access to the premium version, that can also add an additional level of comparison.
  - e. A more streamlined option to save energy, resources, and/or time is for the instructor to generate the AI translation(s) and have all students discuss the same example.

5. Discuss in pairs and/or as a class:
  - a. How do the different translations compare? What did the human translator do that Google Translate or ChatGPT didn't, and vice versa?
  - b. Did you and your partner get different results from ChatGPT? How were your prompts different? How did this seem to affect the translation?
  - c. Did ChatGPT's explanation of its reasoning make sense? How is it similar to or different from the types of challenges you discussed regarding your own translation? Do you agree with its choices and reasoning?
  - d. Do you think the ChatGPT translation or the human translation is better? Why? Which is better at translating: humor/jokes; flow; rhythm; slang (...etc.)
6. A debrief as a class is highly recommended. This could include:
  - a. Addressing abilities and limitations of machine translation in its different forms. Emphasize that while ChatGPT's translation is likely stronger than Google's (and ChatGPT 4's, if someone has access, is probably stronger still), it may not take the same creative liberties that a human can, or manage the same nuances of "domestication" into the target language vs. "foreignization" of the translated text. This is because, although it can generate explanations of its translations, it cannot actually think through them as a human can. It likewise does not have a unique voice or personality as human writers do.
  - b. Discussing how it relates to translation as a craft and a practice, and/or uses of translation in day-to-day life or in the world of business.
    - i. For instance, what makes translation as a craft different than plugging text into a machine? What are the different applications of this tool and its potential limitations in different contexts?
  - c. Discussing the extent to which ChatGPT illustrates issues already present in human translation, and the extent to which it introduces new problems
  - d. The ethics of using ChatGPT for translation (or for other tasks). This might include:
    - i. The environmental impact and/or resource usage of AI translation vs. fully human-generated translation
    - ii. The potential economic or labor-related impact of using AI for translation
    - iii. Ethical issues surrounding source data and data privacy, bias in source data, and copyright/fair use concerns
  - e. Connecting the exercise to relevant course concepts, objectives, or assignments

#### Example of Google Translate, ChatGPT 3.5, and ChatGPT 4 Translations:

##### Original text:

Transcribed excerpt from comedy routine by Leo Harlem: "Leo Harlem: 20 años no es nada | #0." *YouTube*, uploaded by Qué Ver en Movistar Plus+, 4 April 2022, 6:32-7:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmsRvUb9Zq8>.

"Y lo he intentado con el tenis, porque te lo venden muy bien. Dices que en el tenis lo que más vale es el respeto al adversario, es el fair play. Digo, pues no puedo estar de acuerdo con esto. Yo fui a jugar al tenis con un amigo mío de toda la vida, un gran amigo, y a los tres puntos paré en seco. Digo, quieto. Yo no voy a estar así toda la mañana. Digo, he notado que las tiras donde no estoy. No, a vosotros os hace mucha gracia porque no estabais allí, me estaba dando una paliza seria. Digo, estaba aquí, me las tirabas

allí, creé que este era tu sitio favorito y yo, por amistad, he venido aquí. Y cuál es mi sorpresa que las tiras al otro lado, que es donde estaba yo antes. Y yo a ti te las estoy tirando bien, no creo que sea tan difícil. Soy el único tío con un polo y una raqueta en frente tuyo, estamos pagando la pista a medias, hemos venido juntos en el mismo coche, no me jodas la mañana. Oye, de verdad es que no respeta. No respeta.”

Google Translate translation:

"And I have tried it with tennis, because they sell it to you very well. You say that in tennis what is most valuable is respect for your opponent, it is fair play. I say, well, I cannot agree with this. I went to playing tennis with a lifelong friend of mine, a great friend, and after three points I stopped dead. I say, stay still. I'm not going to be like this all morning. I mean, I've noticed that you throw them where I'm not. No. "You guys find it very funny because you weren't there, I was getting seriously beaten up. I mean, I was here, you were f\*\*\*ing me there, I thought this was your favorite place and I, out of friendship, came here. And what is my Surprise that you throw them to the other side, which is where I was before. And I'm throwing them to you well, I don't think it's that difficult. I'm the only guy with a polo and a racket in front of you, we're paying for the court halfway, we came together in the same car, don't screw with my morning. Hey, he really doesn't respect. He doesn't respect."

***Example ChatGPT Prompt: "Translate the following paragraph into English, maintaining its tone, humor, and regional specificities"***

ChatGPT 3.5 translation:

And I've tried it with tennis, because they sell it to you so well. You say that in tennis what matters most is respect for your opponent, it's fair play. I say, well I can't agree with this. I went to play tennis with a lifelong friend of mine, a great friend, and at three points I stopped dead in my tracks. I said, hold on. I'm not going to be like this all morning. I mean, I've noticed where I'm not. No, you find it very funny because you weren't there, but I was getting seriously beaten. I mean, I was here, you were hitting them there, I thought this was your favorite spot and I, out of friendship, came here. And what's my surprise, you hit them to the other side, where I was before. And I'm hitting them to you just fine, I don't think it's that difficult. I'm the only guy with a polo shirt and a racket in front of you, we're splitting the cost of the court, we came together in the same car, don't ruin my morning. Hey, seriously, he just doesn't respect. He doesn't respect.

ChatGPT 4 translation:

"And I've tried it with tennis, because they really sell it to you. You say that in tennis, what matters most is respect for the opponent, it's fair play. I say, well, I can't agree with that. I went to play tennis with a lifelong friend of mine, a great friend, and after three points, I stopped dead. I say, hold on. I'm not going to be like this all morning. I say, I've noticed that you're hitting it where I'm not. No, you guys find it very funny because you weren't there, he was giving me a serious beating. I say, I was here, you were hitting them there, I thought this was your favorite spot, and I, out of friendship, came here. And what do I find but that you're hitting them to the other side, where I was before. And I'm hitting them to you nicely, I don't think it's that hard. I'm the only guy with a polo shirt and a racket in front of you, we're splitting the court fee, we came together in the same car, don't ruin my morning. Hey, seriously, there's no respect. No respect."