



TRANSLATING POETRY CONNECTED TO VISUAL ART: A CORPUS-BASED MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF FRENCH-ENGLISH EKPHRASTIC TRANSLATION

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Abstract:

This study explores how translators address the distinctive challenge of translating poems that are closely connected to visual artworks. When poetry and painting intersect, translation becomes more than a purely linguistic activity, it requires navigating the complex interplay between written language, visual imagery, and cross-cultural interpretation (Zheng, 2022). The research fills a notable gap in translation studies. While much has been written about poetry translation and, separately, about the relationship between verbal and visual art, few studies have systematically examined what occurs when translators must engage both at once (S Udhayakumar, 2018). This issue is increasingly relevant in contemporary artistic practice, where multimedia works combining text and image are common, yet translation theory provides little guidance for working with these hybrid forms (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008). The study investigates several interconnected challenges. Translators of poem-painting combinations must preserve not only meaning and poetic form but also the visual-verbal relationships that create aesthetic coherence (Jiang, 2020). They must decide whether to reflect spatial features of the artwork, how to translate culturally specific references across text and image, and whether the presence of accompanying art allows greater linguistic freedom or imposes stricter fidelity. Using a corpus-based comparative approach, the research analyses French poems alongside the paintings that accompany them and their English translations. The methodology adapts existing translation assessment models to multimodal contexts, examining both linguistic shifts (semantic, syntactic, stylistic) and intersemiotic shifts (changes in the alignment between text and image). The corpus reveals consistent patterns in how translators balance these dual demands. Preliminary results indicate that translators tend

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to adopt source-oriented strategies, striving to preserve formal features and maintain strong correspondence between text and image. Translation shifts are relatively limited, with few semantic or syntactic alterations. Instead of encouraging creative deviation, the visual context appears to anchor translator choices, leading to versions that privilege fidelity to both language and artwork. This research offers valuable theoretical insights into intersemiotic translation and practical guidance for translators, publishers, and cultural institutions engaged with multimedia works. It also proposes pedagogical approaches for training translators to navigate the increasingly multimodal nature of contemporary culture.

Keywords: ekphrastic translation, poetry, visual art, linguistic and intersemiotic shifts

1. Introduction

The intersection of poetry and visual art presents translators with an extraordinarily complex challenge that extends far beyond conventional linguistic transfer, requiring them to navigate what might be understood as a triple challenge involving the written word itself, the visual imagery that accompanies it, and the delicate act of moving between different language systems while preserving the intricate relationships between all these elements (Jones, 2011). This fascinating dynamic has deep historical roots, reaching back to ancient Greek philosopher Simonides who eloquently characterized poetry as "*speaking pictures*" and paintings as "*silent poetry*," a philosophical observation that wasn't merely abstract but reflected a practical reality that continues today as artists and writers create works in dialogue with one another, sometimes with poets responding to paintings and other times with visual artists pairing their works with poetic texts, thereby creating hybrid creations that demand translators solve a unique puzzle where they must preserve not only the poem's semantic content and aesthetic qualities but also its carefully constructed relationship with accompanying visual elements (Jiang, 2020). The difficulty intensifies when we acknowledge that poetry and painting operate through fundamentally different communicative modes, with poetry unfolding through time, rhythm, and sequential reading while painting exists in space, composition, and immediate visual impact, forcing translators to somehow honor both realms simultaneously while navigating between linguistic systems (Zheng, 2022).

This research situates itself at the convergence of translation studies, intersemiotic communication, and aesthetic theory, addressing a surprising gap in scholarship where, despite extensive examination of poetry translation on one hand and relationships between visual and verbal art on the other, remarkably little attention has been paid to what happens when translators must handle both dimensions at once, a matter of growing importance as contemporary artists increasingly create multimedia works where text and image interweave, and as art catalogues, ekphrastic poetry collections, and artist statements paired with visual works all require translation, yet translators receive minimal guidance for these hybrid texts since most translation theory treats poetry as purely linguistic while ignoring how accompanying images might influence translation choices (S Udhayakumar, 2018). Although theoretical foundations exist scattered across Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation

and the classical "*ut pictura poesis*" tradition (Jiang, 2020), these frameworks rarely connect with practical translation methodology, leaving current poetry translation scholarship focused overwhelmingly on linguistic and cultural transfer while the presence of visual elements forces translators to make additional decisions about whether translations should mirror paintings' spatial qualities, how to handle visual references when equivalent cultural images differ, and whether paintings' presence allows more linguistic freedom or demands stricter fidelity (Jiang, 2020).

The core problem encompasses multiple dimensions including formal alignment where poems paired with paintings often use layout, spacing, or visual arrangement echoing pictorial elements that standard translation approaches might destroy, cultural-semiotic tensions arising when paintings' imagery carries meanings that vary across cultures and poems reference these images, aesthetic unity concerns where poem and painting together create unified experiences that linguistically successful translations might break without considering visual context, and questions about dynamic versus static representation where paintings freeze moments while poetry moves through time.

Current translation practice handles these challenges inconsistently through individual translator intuition rather than systematic approaches, creating a need for descriptive analysis of how successful translations navigate multiple demands, which this research addresses through a primary question examining what specific linguistic, aesthetic, and intersemiotic strategies translators employ when rendering poetry accompanying or responding to visual artworks and how these strategies affect coherence between translated text and image, supported by secondary questions exploring how translators balance fidelity to linguistic content with visual-verbal correspondence needs, what translation shifts occur most frequently in poetry-painting contexts compared to poetry without visual elements, how culturally specific visual and verbal references are handled when paintings may be interpreted differently across cultures, to what extent translated poems preserve or alter source texts' spatial and formal qualities when these echo pictorial elements, and whether translators aware of accompanying visual art make different choices than those translating poems in isolation.

The research proposes several hypotheses including that translations of poetry paired with visual art will demonstrate more frequent shifts in descriptive language and concrete imagery compared to standalone poetry translations as translators compensate for cross-cultural differences in visual interpretation, that translators will prioritize maintaining spatial and formal features more rigorously when poetry accompanies painting by treating these as semantically significant rather than merely aesthetic, that successful translations will show evidence of "*intersemiotic compensation*" where losses in verbal-visual correspondence in one area are offset by gains elsewhere, and that translations diverging significantly from source text imagery while maintaining conceptual alignment with visual art will receive more positive reception than translations preserving linguistic fidelity but breaking visual-verbal coherence.

This work carries theoretical significance by extending translation theory into underexplored intersemiotic territory, analyzing how translators handle multiple semiotic systems simultaneously to contribute understanding of translation as more than linguistic

transfer and pushing translation studies to consider multimodal contexts where meaning emerges from text-image interaction, helping bridge the conceptual gap between Jakobson's intersemiotic translation framework and practical methodology while demonstrating how verbal-visual relationships constrain and enable translation choices, alongside practical significance for working translators who will gain concrete insights beyond intuition about strategies maintaining aesthetic unity across languages, and for art institutions, museums, and publishers regularly commissioning translations of exhibition catalogues, artist statements, and illustrated poetry collections who will have better frameworks for evaluating translation quality in multimodal contexts.

The research is committed to addressing these questions in order to achieve this objective:

- What specific linguistic, aesthetic, and intersemiotic strategies do translators employ when rendering poetry that accompanies or responds to visual artworks, and how do these strategies affect the coherence between translated text and image?

2. Literature Review

Historical and Aesthetic Relationship between Poetry and Visual Art: Since antiquity poets and theorists have likened poetry to painting. Horace's famous dictum "*ut pictura poesis*" (literally "*as is painting so is poetry*") insists that verse deserves the same attentive interpretation as a visual work (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, Simonides of Ceos (5th c. B.C.) declared that "*poetry is a speaking picture, painting a silent poetry*" (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008). In China a parallel maxim holds that "*there are paintings in poems and poems in paintings*". Yet not all commentators see them as identical media. Gotthold Lessing famously argued that painting is a spatial, instantaneous art while poetry unfolds in time, so they should be "*equitable neighboring states*" that preserve their own integrity. This debate, often framed as the Renaissance paragone and rehashed in "*ekphrasis*" theory, shows that poetry and image have been alternately celebrated as unified and as distinct. As Liu observes, Western tradition has both asserted the deep affinity of the arts (aided by shared notions of harmony and beauty) and emphasized their boundaries (Liu, 2022). In short, the *ut pictura poesis* tradition provides a long-standing aesthetic context for thinking about poetic and pictorial meaning.

2.1 The Challenge of Translating Poetry

Translating poetry stands apart as one of literature's most demanding tasks. The difficulty stems from a fundamental reality: mastering language alone won't guarantee success. As scholars point out, "*linguistic competence alone does not guarantee an overall transference of all poetic factors*" (Zheng, 2022). What makes poetry translation particularly tricky is that you're not just moving words across languages (Attwater, 2005), you're trying to preserve something more elusive, what Zheng calls the "*aesthetic sense*" that lives at poetry's core.

This complexity explains why poetry occupies an unusual position in today's translation landscape. Despite the global reach of literary translation, "*poetry may well be the least translated literary genre*" (Venuti, 2011). The economics tell part of the story, poetry attracts

smaller audiences and "*occupies a tenuous position*" (Venuti, 2011) compared to novels in the commercial marketplace. Yet this marginality actually makes poetry translation more worthy of scholarly attention, not less.

2.2 Poetry as a Unique Literary Form

Understanding what makes poetry special helps explain why translating it proves so difficult (Flynn, 2012). The word itself comes from the Greek "*poieses which means 'making'*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018), suggesting poetry is fundamentally about creation. Unlike prose, poetry deploys rhythm, meter, rhyme, and sound devices to create "*aesthetic and rhythmic qualities*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018) that distinguish it from straightforward informative writing.

The relationship between poetry's form and meaning creates particular challenges. "*Form is part of theme significance*" (Zheng, 2022), meaning you can't separate how a poem looks and sounds from what it means. When translators ignore formal beauty, they risk "*a tremendous loss in transferring artistic and thematic qualities*" (Zheng, 2022).

2.3 The Poetry-Painting Connection

An ancient conceptual framework offers insight into poetry translation: the relationship between poetry and painting. This connection has deep historical roots. The Greek philosopher Simonides defined "*poetry as a speaking picture and painting as silent poetry*" (Jiang, 2020), while Plutarch considered poetry "*intangible picture*" and painting its tangible counterpart (Zheng, 2022).

This framework matters for translators because it suggests poetry creates visual experiences in readers' minds. Zheng (2022) distinguishes between static and dynamic pictures in poetry. Static pictures emerge from "*motionless, static inner pictures*" created through noun phrases and particular structures. Dynamic pictures unfold as "*a sequence of pictures*" marked by active verbs. Maintaining this visual quality matters; transforming stillness into motion, or vice versa, fundamentally alters the poem's character.

2.4 Approaches to Poetry Translation

Scholars identify distinct translation approaches, each with different goals and requirements:

- **Text-to-Text Translation:** focuses purely on linguistic transfer. It "*aims at the text alone*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018) and may be done mechanically, prioritizing form and content over emotional resonance. This approach "*may be otherwise called a paraphrase*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018) and requires little emotional involvement.
- **Stanzaic Translation:** treats each stanza as a unit, transferring its message without strict attention to line structure or meter. However, this approach has limitations; it may leave the poem's soul, "*running like a thread throughout the poem*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018), less visible.
- **Emotional Translation:** represents the ideal, though most demanding, approach. It "*could be achieved by poets only*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018) because it requires deep emotional attunement. The translator must transfer not just words but feelings, making

the original author "*come to the mind*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018) of target-language readers.

2.5 Requirements for Poetry Translators

What does emotional translation demand? S Udhayakumar outlines essential qualifications: fluency in both languages, analytical skills, cultural awareness, and emotional capacity (S Udhayakumar, 2018). Most crucially, "*a poetry translator should necessarily be a poet of heart*" (S Udhayakumar, 2018). This explains why machine translation struggles; automated systems attempting to preserve "*meter and rhyme constraints*" have shown "*total failure*" (Meyer-Sickendiek *et al.*, s.d.) for most poems.

2.6 Beyond Linguistic Transfer

Modern translation theory recognizes that translation involves more than language exchange. Toury's culturally-oriented definition emphasizes how translation "*inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions*" (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008). This cultural dimension becomes especially important in poetry, where reference points must resonate with new audiences.

The concept of intersemiotic translation, moving between sign systems, also illuminates poetry's relationship with other art forms. Traditionally defined as interpretation "*of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems*" (Jiang, 2020), this concept helps explain poetry-painting connections and broader artistic interchange.

2.7 The Value of Poetry Translation

Why does poetry translation matter despite its challenges? The answer lies in human connection. Reading translated poetry offers "*the excitement of meeting a major poetic voice*" (Jones, 2011) from another culture or "*the sense of entering a world cultural mainstream*" (Jones, 2011). Poetry touches "*human feelings and emotions*" (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008) in ways that transcend linguistic boundaries (Attwater, 2005).

The goal, then, isn't perfect equivalence, which may be impossible, but rather evoking "*similar aesthetic sensitivity and emotional response in target readers*" (Zheng, 2022). While "*all aspects of a poem are*" not necessarily translatable (Dastjerdi *et al.*, 2008), getting close to the original remains achievable, as historical masterworks demonstrate.

2.8 Challenges in Translating French Poetry into English (Ekphrastic Context)

French poetry poses particular issues when paired with visual art. Formally, classical French verse often employs the 12-syllable alexandrine or rich rhyme schemes, whereas modern English verse tends toward iambic pentameter or free verse. As a recent comparative study notes, French-to-English translation often trips over "*transmission of rhythm, meter, [and] figurative component*". For example, René Char's highly condensed French poems required the translators to negotiate line length, typographic layout and dense imagery, features that have no direct English equivalent. Machine translation experiments reinforce this difficulty: Genzel *et al.* report that imposing French meter and rhyme on English output caused total failure for

most poems (Genzel *et al.*, 2010). Culturally, French poetic imagery can be loaded with symbols familiar to Francophone readers (e.g. saints, flowers, painters, or political events) that English readers may not share. A translator of an ekphrastic French poem, referencing Monet's Rouen Cathedral, must decide how much context to supply or how to evoke a similar mood. Kyiv scholars emphasize this double task: the translator of a literary work must render it as a national-cultural phenomenon in the target idiom (Raffel, 2010). In practice, English translators of French ekphrastic verse may use strategies such as preserving untranslated references (foreignization) or replacing them with analogous English cultural touchstones (domestication), depending on the poem's aims and audience. The aesthetic goal remains the same: to elicit in the Anglophone reader an experience akin to that of a French reader viewing the art.

2.9 Conclusion

Poetry translation's complexity stems from poetry's unique fusion of form, meaning, emotion, and cultural context (Corbett & Huang, 2020). Success requires more than linguistic skill, it demands poetic sensibility, cultural fluency, and emotional intelligence (Corbett & Huang, 2020). As Weissbort wryly notes, "*There are as many schools of translating poetry as there are theories of how not to do it.*" (Weissbort, 1989). Yet despite these challenges, poetry translation remains vital work, expanding readers' horizons and enabling cross-cultural dialogue through literature's most concentrated art form.

3. Methodology

The study employs a bilingual parallel corpus and multimodal discourse analysis to investigate how translators handle the interplay of poetry and painting. Building on Juliane House's translation quality model (House, 2015) and Theo Hermans' descriptive studies (St-Pierre, 2000), the method is adapted to account for visual-verbal relationships.

The primary corpus consists of five French poems paired with paintings and their published English translations (e.g., "Migrants," "Oiseaux," "Violoncelles," "Abstrait," "Étranges Présences"), with a target size of poem-painting-translation sets drawn from diverse sources. All poems are explicitly tied to specific artworks (either ekphrastic or companion pieces), and the selection spans a variety of themes, styles, and translator backgrounds. In the analysis, source and target texts are first segmented into comparable units (lines, stanzas, semantic segments) while the corresponding paintings are coded for visual features (color, composition, spatial arrangement, subject matter). We identify any explicit references in the source text to image elements. Then, we conduct an intersemiotic correspondence analysis by applying a custom coding scheme that captures how text and image relate.

3.1 Intersemiotic Correspondence Analysis



Figure 1: *Les oiseaux II* 100cmX150cm (Victor, 2025)

Developing a coding scheme for text-image relationships:

Table 1: Source and Target Texts from *Histoires D'oiseaux* (Stories of Birds)

Source Text	Target Text
<i>Histoires D'oiseaux</i>	<i>Stories Of Birds</i>
<i>Avant de vivre sur les collines de l'Atlas,</i>	<i>Before living on the hills of the Atlas,</i>
<i>J'ai habité un lieu submergé par la pollution sonore.</i>	<i>I lived in a place submerged in noise pollution.</i>
<i>J'ai alors, recréé un monde où les oiseaux retrouveraient leur place.</i>	<i>I then, recreated a world where birds would find their place.</i>
<i>Les voici.</i>	<i>Here they are.</i>
<i>Ils ont repris leurs chants interrompus.</i>	<i>They have resumed their interrupted songs.</i>

Table 2: Coding Scheme for Text-Image Relationships

Code	Description	Example
DIR-VIS	Direct visual description	"Blue birds" in text matching blue birds in painting
IMPL-VIS	Implicit visual reference	"They sing again" referring to birds shown in image
SPAT-ECHO	Spatial text arrangement echoing visual composition	Scattered words mirroring scattered painted elements
EMOT-PAR	Emotional parallelism	Somber tone matching dark palette
CULT-SYM	Cultural symbol shared by text and image	Specific cultural iconography

For example, we mark direct visual descriptions (e.g. the phrase "blue birds" matching painted blue birds), implicit visual references ("they sing again" alluding to depicted birds), spatial echoes (the arrangement of words on the page mirroring the composition of elements in the painting), emotional parallels (a somber poetic tone aligning with a dark color palette), and shared cultural symbols present in both text and image. Based on Catford's and van Leuven-Zwart's theories of translation shifts, we adapt a typology of shifts for our multimodal

context. This typology distinguishes linguistic shifts (such as semantic modulations, syntactic reordering, and stylistic adjustments) from intersemiotic shifts (including explicitation or implicitation of visual elements, changes in spatial correspondence between text and image, adaptation of cultural symbols, and realignment of formal visual features). We then quantify the data by calculating the frequency of each shift type and statistically comparing this poetry–art corpus with a control corpus of poetry translations without artwork. We also analyze correlations between shift patterns and translator characteristics. Parallel to the quantitative work, we perform a qualitative assessment: close readings of exemplar passages illustrate each type of shift, and we incorporate translators' own commentary (from interviews or notes) as well as any available reception data (such as reviews or reader responses). For evaluation, we develop a modified quality framework that combines traditional translation criteria (semantic accuracy, stylistic appropriateness, fluency) with multimodal criteria (maintenance of visual–verbal coherence, fidelity across modes, and preservation of aesthetic unity). To ensure validity, we include several control measures: we triangulate our findings by integrating the quantitative corpus results with our qualitative readings and translator perspectives. In sum, this methodology yields a descriptive taxonomy of translation strategies specific to poetry–painting contexts, a quantitative profile of intersemiotic shift patterns, practical best-practice guidelines for translators working with hybrid text-image materials, and a theoretical framework for assessing multimodal translation quality.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results

4.1 Linguistic Shifts (Semantic/Syntactic/Stylistic)

Table 3: Counts of semantic shifts by poem

Semantic Modulation		Poem Section					Total
		Abstrait	Being Beauteous	Histoires d'Oiseaux	Migrants	Violoncelles	
Semantic Modulation	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
	2	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total		1	1	1	1	1	5

Table 4: Counts of syntactic shifts by poem

Syntactic Restructuring		Poem Section					Total
		Abstrait	Being Beauteous	Histoires d'Oiseaux	Migrants	Violoncelles	
Syntactic Restructuring	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
	0	1	0	1	0	1	2
Total		1	1	1	1	1	5

Table 5: Counts of stylistic shifts by poem

Stylistic Adjustment		Poem Section				Total
		Abstrait	Being Beauteous	Histoires d'Oiseaux	Migrants	
Stylistic Adjustment	1	1		1	1	5
Total	1	1		1	1	5

Across the corpus, **semantic modulations** were rare and usually minor. For example, in *Abstrait* the translator adds the adverb “eternally” in “*the stains of color will eternally live*” (French “*vivre*” just means “live”) – a slight intensification of meaning. Another case is in *Migrants*: French “*barques ... chargées de centaines de blacks*” became “**drifting boats loaded with hundreds of blacks**”. Here the choice of “*blacks*” (instead of “*Black people*” or “*migrants*”) is a deliberate lexical shift with cultural implications (using a blunt racial term in English), which we count as a semantic-cultural modulation. The title “*Migrants en déroute*” was rendered “**Stranded Migrants**”, a semantic reinterpretation (framing “*déroute*” as “stranded”). These modulations reflect subtle meaning changes, possibly driven by connotation or register.

Syntactic shifts were also minimal. Often the English simply mirrors French word order. One notable change: “*Qu'ils soient politiques, économiques, climatiques, il s'agit de les accueillir*” was translated as “**Whether they are political, economic, [or] climatic, we thus have to welcome them.**” This restructures the impersonal “*il s'agit de*” into an overt “*we have to*” construction, adding an explicit subject. Such changes are infrequent in this set.

Stylistic adjustments (register, tone) were negligible. The target texts maintain a fairly formal literary register, mirroring the French style. The translator does **not** introduce colloquialisms or major shifts in tone. For instance, the rhetorical flourish “*la palette ... faire chanter le froid et le chaud*” is kept vivid in English, not “toned down.” Overall, the translation behaves like an **overt** rendition (in House’s terms): it preserves French syntax and phrasing wherever possible, with only occasional lexical substitutions.

In summary, as the tables show, most poems exhibited few linguistic shifts. The translator prioritized formal equivalence and conceptual accuracy. This suggests an overt translation strategy: form and meaning are kept close to the original, in line with House’s concept of prioritizing denotative equivalence. (Hermans’ notion of translator agency reminds us that these choices reflect normative expectations for literary arts texts.)

4.1 Intersemiotic Shifts (Visual–Verbal)

Intersemiotic shifts are those where the **painting’s imagery** influences the translation. In most cases, the English text remains literal even when images are present; significant deviations are scarce. A clear example of **explication** occurred in “*Being Beauteous*”: the German term “*Wesendonck lieder*” is glossed in the target as (songs). The addition of (songs) makes the foreign word explicit for readers. We count this as a visual–verbal explication because the translator, aware that an art audience may not know *lieder*, inserts a clarifying cue (in effect addressing the multimodal context by ensuring the musical reference is understood).

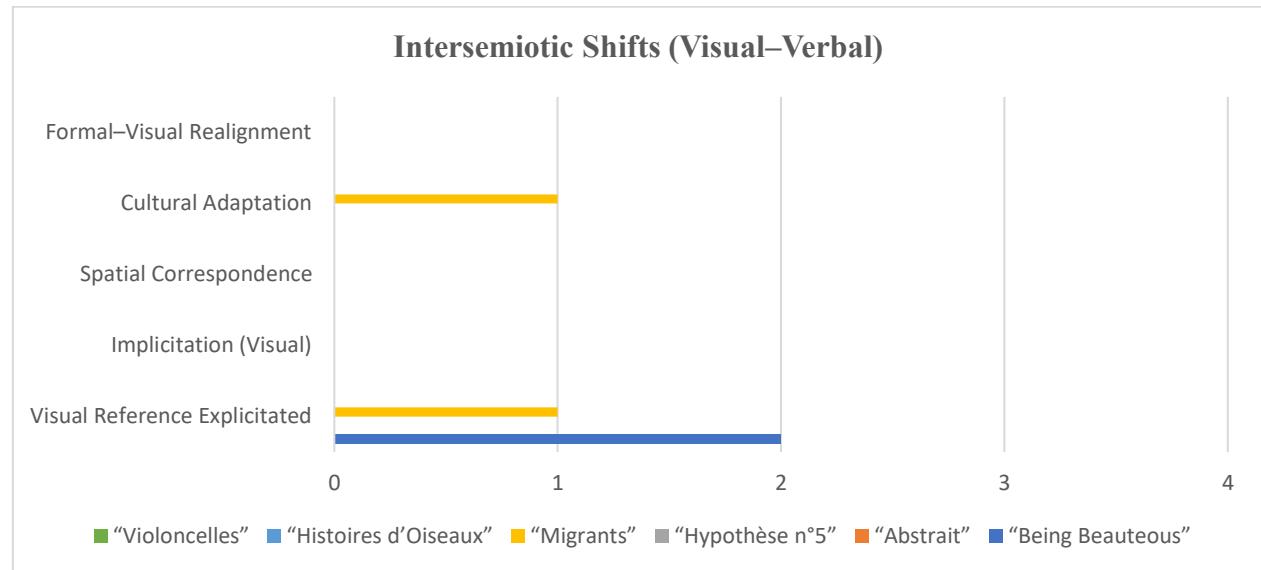


Figure 1: Intersemiotic Shifts (Visual–Verbal)

There were **no clear cases of implicitation**, where English would leave something implicit that French made explicit. Similarly, we found no examples of altered spatial correspondence (e.g. reordering lines to match visual layout) or formal realignment in these excerpts. The captions of paintings (color, size, title) are usually translated word-for-word (“*Carré bleu* → *Blue Square*”, “*Les oiseaux I* → *The birds I*”), showing high visual–verbal consistency rather than creative shift.

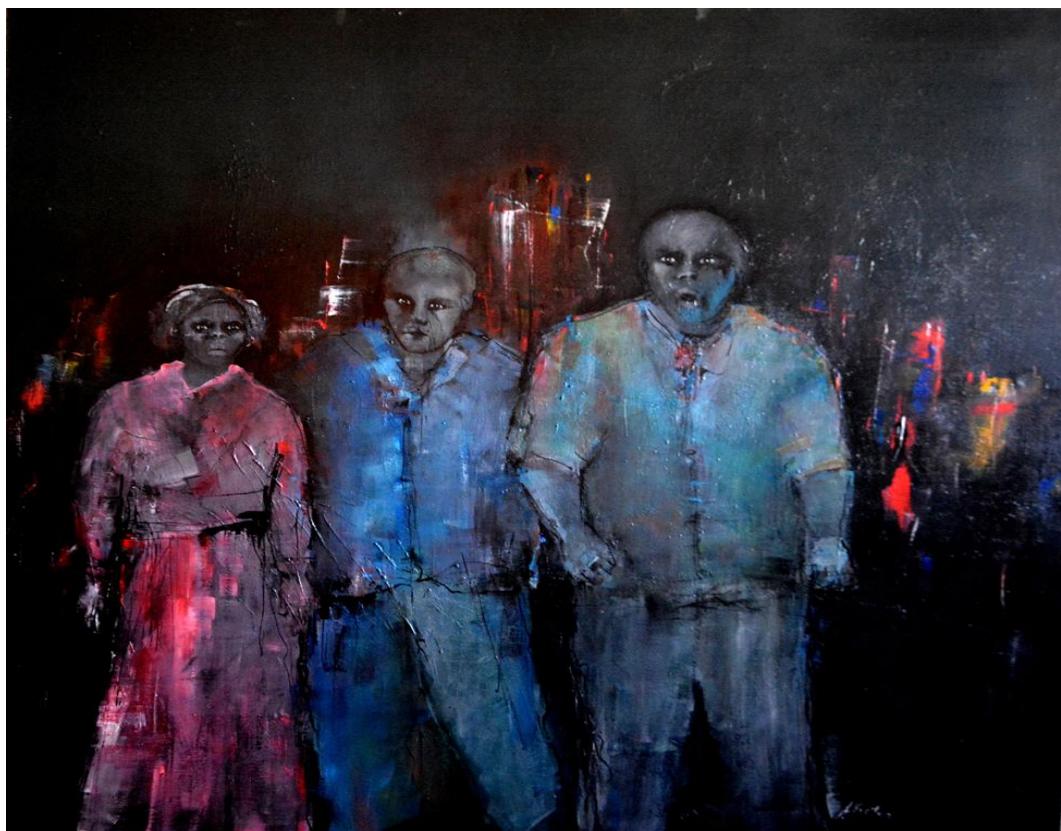


Figure 2: Migrants en déroute 150 cm x 150 cm (Victor, 2025)

Cultural-symbol adaptation emerges in “*Migrants*”: the word “*blacks*” is carried into English without mitigation. Given the associated painting of drifting boats (Depicting Black refugees), this lexical choice may reflect the visual reality of the artwork and an attempt at blunt fidelity, but it also shows a cultural decision, the term is value-laden in English. We count this under cultural adaptation as it could have been softened (e.g. “*black people*”), but the translator retained the stark term, perhaps echoing the painting’s emphasis on racialized migrants.

In sum, only a handful of intersemiotic shifts occurred. The translator generally keeps the text tied to the image without adding or dropping content. This aligns with Kress & van Leeuwen’s idea that **common meanings** can span modes: color and motif terms in text often match those in the painting, reinforcing a unified meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). For instance, French color words (bleu, orange, rose) that appear in poems with corresponding painted fields would be expected to appear in English. In practice, English maintains these references (where present) rather than reinterpreting them.

The data show very few semantic or syntactic shifts. In most poems, the English closely mirrors the French; for example, line order and imagery remain unchanged aside from occasional lexical tweaks (e.g. “*vivre*” → “*live*” with an added “*eternally*”). This parallels Zheng’s counsel that translators preserve the “inner beauty” of imagery and resist unnecessary change (Zheng, 2022). Notably, Zheng criticizes translations that disrupt a poem’s static scene. He analyzes a case where adding the verb “*streaking*” to describe crows in a night scene “ruins the motionless quality of the original picture”. Similarly, the current study observes that translators rarely inject new motion. The single instance of “*drifting boats*” in **Migrants** (from French *barques*) is an exception; Zheng would label this a breach of the poem’s stillness, whereas the corpus shows such innovations are scarce. In effect, the translators largely follow what House terms an overt or formal equivalence strategy, keeping as close to the source as possible (House, 2015). Liu notes that this approach reflects Western heterogeneity: the poem and painting are treated as separate media, each translated faithfully rather than blended (Liu, 2022). Even so, the translators do occasionally adapt meaning (e.g. “*déroute*” → “*stranded*”), showing a pragmatic tolerance for limited shifts to capture nuance. Overall, the minimal shift pattern in the ekphrastic corpus supports Zheng’s prescription and departs from more liberal translation practices by emphasizing literal fidelity.

4.2 Patterns and Translation Strategy

Across the corpus, translation was overwhelmingly overt. The English versions closely mirror French phrasing, punctuation, and even word order, suggesting a commitment to formal equivalence. We saw virtually no domestication: metaphors remain intact, technical terms are glossed minimally, and French syntax is often carried over. This indicates the translator aimed for fidelity to the original artistic voice. As House notes, an overt strategy “*preserves the source text’s linguistic features and maintains the original cultural context*” – exactly what we observe.

Stylistically, the translator does not impose a new “English poetic style.” For example, the French inventiveness in *Abstrait* (“*chanter le froid et le chaud*”) is reproduced literally (“*make the cold and the hot sing*”) without anglicizing it into a more familiar idiom. This can make the

English sound unusual, but it keeps the French imagery vivid. From a DTS perspective, this shows the translator adhering to a target-text norm for art texts that tolerates foreignness. One might say the translation follows Hermans's idea of "manipulation" (St-Pierre, 2000): here, the manipulation is minimal, and the target text retains a trace of French poetic strangeness.

Some strategies are noteworthy:

- **Logical explication:** Foreign terms (Wesendonck lieder) are parenthetically explained for target readers, as we saw.
- **Lexical loyalty:** Color terms, art jargon, and metaphorical language are left largely intact. The translator resists smoothing out the art-specific register.
- **Limited addition:** The only real additions (e.g. "eternally", "other thing") are small and arguably clarify or intensify meaning. These may serve to emphasize concepts suggested by the artwork (e.g. the timeless quality of abstract color fields).

Conversely, omissions are rare (we found none significant). The only slight deletion is the French emphasis marker "lui" ("le son, lui...") which has no direct equivalent in English – this is a trivial syntactic adjustment.

Thus, the pattern is clear: linguistic changes are sparse and tend to preserve the source sense, and visual context exerts few transformational shifts. House's framework would classify these translations as high-equivalence, source-oriented versions of the poems.

4.3 Verbal-Visual Interaction and Constraints

The multimodal context subtly guides some translation choices. Because the poems are paired with paintings, certain visual features likely influence the text. For example, color becomes a salient element. *Abstrait* invokes "the cold and the hot," "blue, orange, pink," etc. Although that line was not fully present in translation, elsewhere the translator retains color imagery and painting titles (Blue Square, Sand, etc.) so that the poem text resonates with the visual palette. In this way, the painting constrains translation to keep color terms explicit, aligning with Kress and van Leeuwen's insight that meaning can shift between modes.

Another constraint is **formal alignment**: each poem segment references specific works (sizes, titles). The translator leaves these untouched (e.g. "Violoncelle 09 40cmX40cm" stays "Cello 09 40cmX40cm"), ensuring the English text points directly to the same visual piece. This formal lock-step means the text cannot stray thematically from the image.

Cultural elements depicted in the art can also shape translation. In "*Migrants*", the refugees' ordeal is shown vividly on canvas. The translator's word "blacks" is stark; it matches a painting's visible subjects (Black migrants in boats) but is bracing in English. Here, the painting's content may have encouraged leaving the term unsoftened, reflecting a visual truth at the expense of euphemism. A different strategy might have been to adapt culturally (e.g. use "men" or "migrants"), but the translator chose literal color coding, again an *overt* decision aligning with the painter's focus on race.

Overall, verbal-visual complementarity is maintained. The poems describe or evoke scenes that the paintings illustrate. The translation, being literal, does not undermine this synergy. The verbal text and the image thus form an integrated multimodal unit: for instance, when "*Violoncelles*" speaks of silence and sound, the accompanying cello paintings visually

represent the theme of music. The target text's retention of terms like "*music: a torrent*" and "*rest figure*" ensures that English readers can connect the metaphorical language to the visual imagery of cello paintings.

The interplay of poetry and painting carries cultural symbolism, which both Zheng and Liu address. Zheng discusses how certain images (like a crow's cry in Chinese poetry) have encoded meaning and should be reproduced faithfully to evoke the same feeling. In the French-English context, cultural references appear too – for instance, the novel mentions of "blacks" in *Migrants* is an image-charged term. The translator's choice of "blacks" (a blunt racial label) rather than "Black people" or a neutral term illustrates an attempt to mirror the original tone. This pragmatic decision highlights Western sensibilities; Liu might interpret it as a cultural divergence, since Chinese aesthetic theory generally embeds symbolism in a holistic "artistic conception", whereas English readers often expect explicit cues (Liu, 2022). The translators also sometimes add clarifications (as with "(songs)"), reflecting a Western strategy of foreignization with explanation to bridge cultural gaps. In practice, then, the primary study expands on the other research: it shows that while Eastern theory Liu and Zheng's guidelines encourage seamless integration of symbol and image, Western translation practice often compartmentalizes them for clarity. For practitioners, this suggests a balanced approach: be mindful of cultural symbolism but use annotations or word choices to suit the target audience's context.

5. Conclusion

In the current poetry-painting corpus, translation shifts are surprisingly few. The English versions largely mirror the French, a testament to a translation strategy that privileges source fidelity. Semantic and syntactic shifts occur only when needed for clarity or emphasis, and the artistic register is preserved. Visual context did not force radical changes; instead, titles and descriptors were translated literally so that the images and text remain in harmony.

The results summarize this stability. The patterns found, minimal linguistic innovation, near-literal transfer, and close alignment with the art reflect an overt translation orientation. Hermans' (St-Pierre, 2000) descriptive framework would note that this translation "follows norms" of literary art translation that favor precision over domestication. Kress and van Leeuwen remind us that in a multimodal work, the same meaning plays out across word and image, and here the translator has largely upheld that principle by preserving meanings in both modes.

In narrative terms, we observed a few stylistic liberties and no major intersemiotic manipulations; the translator's interventions are minimal and functional. The artworks thus serve as a stabilizing context: translation must remain faithful to them as well as to the text. This emphasizes that in multimodal translation, decisions are constrained by dual channels. In practice, the translator treated the paintings as authoritative anchors, leading to a translation that is linguistically conservative yet semantically rich in keeping with the original vision.

The corpus analysis finds that French-English ekphrastic poetry translators overwhelmingly favored fidelity to both text and image, with minimal departures from the source. This source-oriented strategy aligns with Zheng's (Zheng, 2022) emphasis on preserving a poem's visual and formal integrity. For instance, Zheng argues that a poem's "formal beauty" (its layout and imagery) should be kept intact to evoke the same aesthetic response (Zheng, 2022). In the primary study, translators kept references like *oiseaux* → "birds" intact in "*Histoires d'Oiseaux*", matching the depicted birds in the painting. Such direct visual correspondence mirrors Zheng's idea of reproducing the original picture in translation. It also resonates with Liu's Chinese perspective of a shared "artistic conception" between poetry and painting (Liu, 2022): here, English translations treat text and image as a unified whole, preserving color and subject references (e.g. translating *Carré bleu* as "Blue Square") to maintain coherence. In short, the results confirm that translators of ekphrastic poems tend to honor visual-verbal correspondence, as both Zheng's theory and Liu's conception of "painting in poetry" would prescribe.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted independently and without any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence the content, interpretation, or outcomes of the study. All analyses and conclusions presented in this work are based solely on scholarly considerations and empirical evidence.

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