

Worksheet: Translatability / Untranslatability of Poetry

Topic: Is poetry translatable? Arguments for and against

Part 1. Key quotations for discussion

Read the quotations and prepare to discuss them in class.

1. "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." – **Robert Frost**
2. "Poetry can be translated, but not without loss – and sometimes with gain."
3. "Translating poetry is not transferring words, but recreating experience."

Task 1. First reaction (home)

In **4–5 English sentences**, answer:

- Which quotation do you agree with **most** and why?
- Which one seems **most provocative** for you as a future teacher of English?

Part 2. Arguments "for" and "against" translatability

Task 2. Extracting arguments

For each quotation, write **1–2 English sentences** explaining what it suggests about poetry:

- Is poetry **principally untranslatable** (only "lost")?
- Or is it **partly translatable** (with losses and gains)?
- Or is translation seen as a **necessary cultural practice**, despite imperfections?

Part 3. Applying to a concrete poem

Original (Emily Dickinson):

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us – don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

Ukrainian Translation 1 (М. Стріха):

Я – Ніхто! А ти – це хто?
Теж – Ніхто? Таке добро!
Нас уже двоє... Мовчи ж про це!
Бо проженуть – от і все.

Ukrainian Translation 2 (Д. Павличко):

Я – Ніхто. А ти – хто є?
Теж – Ніхто? Нас вже лиш двоє.
Тільки мовчи, не признавайся –
Нас проженуть обоє.

Task 3. What is “lost” and what “survives”?

In **6–8 English sentences**, comment:

- Which elements of the original **survive** in translation (meaning, tone, playfulness, rhythm, rhyme)?
- Which elements are, in your opinion, **lost or changed**?
- Looking at these translations, which quotation from Part 1 seems **closest to reality**?

Part 4. Preparing for in-class debate

Task 4. Your position

Prepare a **2–3 minute oral statement** finishing one of these sentences:

- “Poetry is principally untranslatable, because ...”
- “Poetry is partly translatable, and the translator’s task is to ...”

Be ready to support your view with:

- **one quotation** from Part 1;
- **one example** from Dickinson’s poem and its translations.