

A Practice Report on Chinese-English Translation Based on Eco-Translatology

—Taking One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories as an Example

Xiaofang Yang^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650500, China*
a. 2488672492@qq.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: As a profound literary form that reflects individual life journeys and their historical contexts, oral autobiographies hold an irreplaceable position in the realm of Chinese literature. They serve not only as precious records of personal memories but also as vivid portrayals of historical transitions and social landscapes. In recent years, with the continuous development of translation studies, Eco-Translatology has emerged as an innovative and dynamic theoretical framework, becoming a focal topic within the field of translation research and attracting extensive scholarly attention and in-depth exploration. This theory emphasizes viewing translation as an interactive process within an ecosystem, focusing on the dynamic balance and harmonious coexistence among the source text, translator, target text, and the translation environment. This paper attempts to apply the core principles of Eco-Translatology to practical translation tasks, selecting the oral autobiography *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories* by Yang Yi as the object of study. Based on a thorough understanding of the source text's content and the author's emotions and intentions, the paper conducts a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the translation from three perspectives: linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Through this research, the aim is to provide a new perspective and methodological inspiration for the translation of autobiographical texts, promoting more diversified and integrated approaches in translation studies. Additionally, this study seeks to enrich and expand existing translation frameworks, offering valuable references for future translation practices.

Keywords: Eco-Translatology, *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories*, three-dimensional transformation.

1. Introduction

Building on the solid foundation of the Theory of Adaptive Selection in Translation, the Eco-Translatology theory has gradually developed and matured into a distinct approach to translation. In his book *Interpretations of Eco-Translatology*, Hu Gengshen explicitly states that Eco-Translatology emphasizes the holistic and interrelated nature of the translation ecosystem. Through its unique

research perspective and narrative methods, the theory provides a detailed description and in-depth explanation of the essence, process, and evaluation criteria of translation [1]. Eco-Translatology emerged against the backdrop of profound ecological wisdom in ancient China and the flourishing development of related disciplines. It reflects the economic and societal transformation in the field of translation studies. By adopting a fresh perspective of “adaptation” and “selection,” this theory reinterprets the essence, standards, and principles of translation. It further constructs a translator-centered framework of “Translation as Adaptation and Selection” [2]. Moreover, Eco-Translatology, supported by solid theoretical research, has initiated diverse research projects in different regions and specific domains. These studies not only highlight the broad influence and remarkable contributions of Eco-Translatology in various academic and practical fields but also enrich its theoretical system and research scope. Such achievements provide significant theoretical and practical guidance for advancing the translation industry, showcasing the indispensable role of Eco-Translatology in propelling the discipline and the profession forward.

As an oral autobiography newly published in 2023, *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories* not only narrates the romantic life of a generation of intellectual women but also recounts a century of familial and national history. It bears an inherent function of witnessing individual destinies, chronicling the times, and conveying culture. Over a decade of work, scholar Yu Bin sought to resist forgetting through attentive listening and to uncover historical truths through detailed narration [3]. The purpose of translating this book is to share the familial affection, friendship, love, and life experiences of renowned translator Yang Yi. It aims to reflect the era, convey culture, and witness history. During the translation process, considering the linguistic and historical-cultural characteristics of *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories*, the author applied Eco-Translatology theory. By analyzing representative sentences in the translation from linguistic, communicative, and cultural dimensions, the study explores the selection and adaptation within the translation’s ecological environment and examines the transformation of communicative thought processes. This not only enhanced the translator’s skills and professional expertise but also provides valuable insights for studying Yang Yi’s life and the historical context of her era.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Core Concepts of Eco-Translatology

Eco-Translatology emphasizes that the translation process is akin to the natural world, existing within a balanced state of a translation ecosystem. In other words, the core concept of Eco-Translatology is “Translation as Ecological Balance,” which encompasses multiple levels: translation, text, and community balance within the ecosystem [4]. Specifically, Eco-Translatology asserts that in the translation process, various factors—such as the source text, target text, translator, reader, and cultural background—interact and maintain a dynamic and stable equilibrium.

2.2. Three-Dimensional Transformation in Eco-Translatology Theory

Within the theory of Eco-Translatology, the three-dimensional transformation perspective refers to the process by which translators must adapt the source text through language, cultural, and communicative dimensions [5]. The linguistic dimension requires the translator to choose words and construct sentences accurately, such as transforming long English sentences into short Chinese ones and nouns into verbs to ensure fluency and accuracy in the translation. The cultural dimension involves the translator’s cross-cultural sensitivity and knowledge to conform to the cultural norms of the target language, accurately conveying the original meaning and cultural nuances. As translation is essentially a cross-cultural communicative activity, the translation process carries specific communicative purposes [6]. The communicative dimension emphasizes that the translator must

focus on the communicative purpose, reproducing the underlying communicative intention from the source text in the target language to achieve the same effect.

3. Adaptation and Selection in the Translation of *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories*

3.1. Adaptation and Selection in Linguistic Dimension

The adaptation and selection in the linguistic dimension involve the translator's careful selection of suitable linguistic forms to convert the content of the source text. Given the significant differences between Chinese and English, the translator must strive to find a balance across multiple aspects—phonetic, semantic, and syntactic—to ensure that the translation is both faithful and fluent, conveying meaning while maintaining the aesthetic quality [7]. Additionally, the translator must consider the practical and artistic value of the source and target languages, ensuring the translation is not only functional but also aesthetically pleasing.

3.1.1. Lexical Level

Source Text: 在蒲草田住了一段时间,一帮学生就都搬走了,并不是闹了什么不愉快,是嫌那儿贵。

Target Text: After a period of time living in Pucaotian, a group of students moved out. It wasn't that there was any unpleasantness between each other, but rather that they found the rent was expensive.

Analysis: A significant difference between Chinese and English is the use of verbs in Chinese compared to prepositions and nouns in English—what can be referred to as the “active-passive distinction.” In the source text, the phrase “闹了什么不愉快” is a verb phrase in Chinese, while the translator converted it directly into a noun phrase, which reflects the English preference for nouns and matches the reading habits of English-speaking readers.

3.1.2. Syntactic Level

Source Text: 是预防警报,城门楼上挂起一只红色的气球。

Target Text: It's a precautionary alarm, and a red balloon was hung on the city gate tower.

Analysis: Chinese often avoids passive voice due to its preference for animate subjects and the frequent use of zero-subject sentences. In contrast, English usually requires a subject for each sentence, and when emphasizing an inanimate subject, passive voice is used. In the source text, the first half of the sentence is a zero-subject clause, and the translator used “It” to act as the subject, referring back to the alarm. In the second part, the passive voice was employed to emphasize that “a red balloon was hung,” making the translation conform to the reading habits of the English-speaking audience.

3.2. Adaptation and Selection in Communicative Dimension

According to the theoretical framework of ecological translation studies, translators must also complete the adaptation and conversion of the communicative dimension, which involves conveying the communicative intention. This requires the translator to focus on the communicative layer of choice and conversion during translation to ensure that the communicative intention of the original text is fully realized in the translation [8]. In other words, the translator must not only ensure accurate transmission of linguistic information but also pay attention to whether the translation can effectively

achieve its communicative purpose, thus ensuring that the translation is faithful to the original while meeting the needs of cross-cultural communication.

3.2.1. Expressive Function

Source Text: 那次沈先生也在的,见状对我笑说:“女侠也害怕嘛。”

Target Text: Mr. Shen was also there that time, and when he saw this, he smiled at me and said, “The ‘female hero’ was also afraid.”

Analysis: In the source text, the term “女侠” is an honorific term for a capable and courageous woman, typically someone with chivalrous qualities and trustworthiness. Mr. Shen refers to Shi Jianqiao as a female hero because Shi Jianqiao had been imprisoned for avenging her father’s death by stabbing Sun Chuanfang and was later reported as a female hero. In translation, the term is rendered as ‘female hero’ with quotation marks to indicate its special significance and to acknowledge Mr. Shen’s affirmation of her courageous actions, maintaining the balance between the original text and the translation.

3.2.2. Imperative Function

Source Text: 之前他就对我说过:要用功哩!我去睡觉,你方可休息。睡迟些怕什么?

Target Text: He said to me before that I need to work hard! And I couldn’t rest before he went to bed. It was not a big deal to sleep late to study.

Analysis: In the source text, Mr. Shen advises the protagonist to study diligently, implying that it’s okay to stay up late occasionally for the purpose of studying. The translation conveys this advice clearly, ensuring that the directive effect is maintained. The addition of ‘to study’ clarifies the purpose behind staying up late, effectively achieving the communicative function of the imperative and realizing the intended message within the target language.

3.3. Adaptation and Selection in the Cultural Dimension

Adapting and selecting for the cultural dimension requires translators to be keenly aware of the subtle differences between the source language and target language cultures, in order to prevent readers from misunderstanding the original text due to cultural perspective limitations [8]. When dealing with specialized terminology or regionally specific nouns in the original text, the translator must demonstrate a high level of cross-cultural sensitivity and deep knowledge to ensure that the translation is not only accurate but also perfectly integrates into the target language and its cultural background, conforming to its norms and habits.

3.3.1. Material Culture

Source Text: 昆明那时用的都是煤油灯,昏黄微明—那个情景我印象太深刻了!

Target Text: At that time, all the kerosene lamps (lighting tools) used in Kunming were dim with faint yellow light. That scene left a deep impression on me!

Analysis: The term “煤油灯” refers to the main lighting tool used before the popularization of electric lights, using kerosene as fuel. It was widely used in rural areas with no access to electricity in the early liberation period and the 1960s and 1970s. The translator provides an explanation in the translation to make the meaning of kerosene lamps clear, enhancing the translation’s adaptation to the ecological environment and achieving cultural dimension conversion.

3.3.2. Ecological Culture

The term “ecological culture words” refers to words related to animals, plants, and the natural environment, reflecting the living state of all organisms in the natural environment.

Source Text: 雨大的时候,雨水从瓦檐上泄下来,整个是透明的门帘。

Target Text: When the rain was heavy, it leaked down from the eaves of the tiles, forming a transparent door curtain.

Analysis: “瓦檐” refers to the eaves of a tile-roofed house, as seen in Hu Ye-pin’s work “To Moscow” (8): “Many paper scraps, many dried leaves, many snow drifts, many small objects in filthy holes, mixed together, like various birds flying in circles on the eaves of each house.” The author translated it as “the eaves of the tiles”. The word “eave” means “the edge of a roof that sticks out beyond the wall,” and “tile” refers to “a ceramic tile or roof tile”. The translator’s choice of translation successfully conveyed the intended meaning in the original text. This adaptation allowed the target language reader to clearly understand what “瓦檐” represents here, reflecting the cultural dimension of translation effectively.

3.3.3. Linguistic Culture

For the choice and adaptation of linguistic culture, the author mainly analyzes translation examples of typical terms and idioms in the original text.

3.3.3.1. Translation of Terms

Source Text: 我和杜运燮去看他,他喜欢听我们“摆龙门阵”,……

Target Text: I, together with Du Yunxie, went to visit him, and he liked to listen to us to chat in an exaggerated way endlessly.

Analysis: “摆龙门阵” refers to a cultural activity in the Sichuan and Chongqing regions where three to five people gather to tell stories, chat, or chat casually. “摆龙门阵” is mainly done in tea houses. Unlike ordinary chatting, it involves using elaborate language, parallelism, and exaggeration to emphasize the mood and expression, making the story seem endless. Even a trivial matter might be embellished with exaggerations and twists. The author did not translate this phrase directly as “arrange troops according to the Dragon Gate tactics” but conveyed its meaning to give the target language reader the correct information about this cultural activity.

3.3.3.2. Translation of Idioms

Source Text: 他和颜悦色,轻声细语的。

Target Text: He was gentle and soft-spoken.

Analysis: In the original text, “和颜” and “悦色” are similar in meaning, as are “轻声” and “细语.” When translating, the author chose one from each pair to avoid redundancy while still conveying the intended meaning. This method successfully achieved the cultural translation dimension, reflecting the soft and gentle communication style conveyed by these terms.

3.3.4. Social Culture

Social culture encompasses all non-material aspects, mirroring people’s lifestyles, behavior patterns, and habits to a certain extent. It includes social customs and culture as core components, deeply embedded in everyday social interactions. The differences in social customs between countries and ethnic groups influence dialogues and exchanges, presenting challenges for translators.

Source Text: 我到昆明不久就开始向《战歌》投稿,加入了文协,跟穆木天、罗铁鹰、雷石榆等诗人一起开座谈会,吃小馆子。

Target Text: I started submitting to “Battle Song” shortly after arriving in Kunming, joined the Writers Association to hold discussions and eat at small restaurant with poets such as Mu Mutian, Luo Tieying, and Lei Shiyu.

Analysis: “吃小馆子” refers to dining at a small restaurant, a common practice among the older generation when describing going to a restaurant for a casual meal. The author translated this as “eat at a small restaurant,” effectively conveying the meaning of the original expression and adapting to the cultural dimension of social culture.

4. Conclusion

Autobiographies, as an important part of China’s literary treasure trove, have always attracted attention from the translation community. They serve as a window for foreign readers to understand the charisma of Chinese luminaries and their historical context. The author of this paper, based on the core theory of ecological translation studies, thoroughly analyzes the translation of *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories* from the perspectives of language, culture, and communication, adapting flexibly across these dimensions to effectively help foreign readers appreciate the unique charm of Chinese literature. The author hopes that this paper can open new perspectives for the translation of autobiographical works and provide valuable references for improving translators’ English-Chinese translation skills. The study has limitations, particularly in its insufficient analysis of adaptation and selection across the language, culture, and communication dimensions. Limited by the author’s level and the scope, it only considered the original language features and did not address factors such as the evaluation of the target language readers. The analysis of the corpus for *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories* was not comprehensive, focusing only on typical examples and discussing linguistic, communicative, and cultural dimensions in a somewhat superficial manner, which requires further improvement in subsequent research.

References

- [1] Hu, G. S. (2008). *Ecological translation studies: An interpretation*. *China Translators*, 29(06), 11-15 + 92.
- [2] Hu, G. S. (2017). *A study on application translation from the perspective of ecological translation studies*. *Shanghai Translation*, (05), 1-6 + 95.
- [3] Chen, S. (2022, December 22). *One Hundred Years, Many People, Many Stories: A personal witness to a century of Chinese history*. *China Women’s News*, (005). <https://doi.org/10.28067/n.cnki.ncfnb.2022.004279>
- [4] Hu, G. S. (2009). *Ecological translation studies: Interdisciplinary integration in translation studies*. *Shanghai Translation*, (02), 3-8.
- [5] Wu, Y. X., & Wang, Y. L. (Year not provided). *A comparative analysis of machine translation and human translation from the perspective of ecological translation studies—Taking agricultural texts as an example*. *Jingu Wenchuang*.
- [6] Jiao, Y. (2006). *Viewing Yan Fu’s translation of “Tian Yan Lun” from the perspective of translation adaptation*. *Journal of Chengdu Educational Institute*, (12), 157-158 + 160.
- [7] Zhang, X. H., & Wang, J. (2023). *A comparative analysis of Li Qingzhao’s “Voice of the Crane” from the perspective of ecological translation studies*. *English Square*, (22), 7-11. <https://doi.org/10.16723/j.cnki.yygc.2023.22.028>
- [8] Guo, Y. J. (2023). *A study of translation adaptation of the novel “Life” from the perspective of ecological translation studies*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). *Xinjiang Normal University*. <https://doi.org/10.27432/d.cnki.gxsfu.2022.000104>