Translation Criticism on Children’s Literature in the New Era from the Perspective of Eco-translatology—
— With an Illustration of Chinese Translation of The Little Prince

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Abstract: In the new media era, the translation ecology of traditional children’s literature translation has changed a lot as children’s language learning, aesthetic taste and psychological development presented new multidimensional characteristics. Based on this, from the perspective of the three-dimensional transformations in Eco-translatology, this paper makes a translation criticism on the childlike language in Zhou Kexi’s Chinese translation of The Little Prince. The purpose is to analyze the professional quality of excellent translators and combine it with the new requirements for translators in the new media era. It is expected to provide reference for the work of translation beginners, translation scholars and translation educators.

Keywords: Eco-translatology, Three-dimensional Transformations, Translation of Children’s Literature, Translation Criticism

1. Introduction

In 1942, a children’s novel called The Little Prince was created by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery. In the more than 70 years of publication, it has been translated into more than 250 languages and won acclaim around the world. A large number of Chinese readers go for this book for its plain but profound words [1]. At present, there are Chinese translations by Zhou Kexi, Zhang Xiaoxian and Huang Hong, etc. Among them, Zhou Kexi’s translation (hereinafter referred to as Z’s translation) has a good grasp of the original idea and its vivid language is full of joy in life, which meets children readers’ needs. Besides, from the perspective of ecological translatology, compared with others, the translated version of Zhou suits the ecological environment of target readers better [2]. Therefore, this article selects the Chinese translation of Mr. Zhou Kexi, a famous French literature translator in China, for further study [3].

2. Ecological Translatology

Eco-translatology was put forward by Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen. As a brand-new paradigm of translation, it focuses on the overall ecology and is based on the approach to Translation as Adaptation and Selection [4]. In line with the global ecological trend, this theory takes nutrients from the eastern wisdom of unity of man and nature and Darwin’s “Nature Selection” theory and is thriving under the guidance of ecological rationality [5]. This emerging theory applies the ecological philosophy to translation studies and looks into translation process from the perspective of translational eco-environment in ways that explore the relationship between the translator and the macro-environment and analyze the development of the translator’s professional ability [6-7].

The translation methods of Eco-translatology are three-dimensional transformations, and evaluation criterion is the “degree of holistic adaptation and selection” [8-9]. Specifically, the three-dimensional transformations include adaptive transformation from the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. From the linguistic dimension, the adaptive transformation emphasizes language expression. While the adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension focuses on the transmission and interpretation of cultural connotations of bilingual languages. The adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension refers to the translator’s awareness to transform bilingual communicative intentions between the source language and the target language. These three elements correspond to the
language ecology, cultural ecology, and communicative ecology in the text. The three are intertwined and indispensable. Only by comprehensively considering these aspects can the original text survive in the new ecological environment [10]. The adaptive selection in these three dimensions is the degree of holistic adaptation and selection, which also contains the adaptive selection of other factors in the translational eco-environment [11]. Eco-translatology believes that the degree of holistic adaptation and selection is positively correlated with the quality of the translation. There are three specific criteria for judgment: translators’ professional accomplishment, feedback from readers and the degree of transformation in the three dimensions [12]. Among them, the last standard is of prime importance for evaluating the translation itself. It pays attention to the effective transmission of linguistic information, cultural information and communicative information between the original text and the translation ecology.

3. Three-dimensional Transformations

The translation is the product of the translator’s adaptive choice in the ecological environment of translation. As it changes, translators will as well make adaptive adjustments in terms of language, culture, and communication [13]. The following is a translation criticism of Z’s version of *The Little Prince* from the three-dimensional transformations of eco-translatology [14].

3.1. Adaptive Transformation from the Linguistic Dimension

Adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension concentrates on factors such as phonetics, vocabulary, and syntax.

3.1.1. Phonetics

Adaptive translation at the phonetic level not only reproduces the unique aural properties of the source text, but also ensures that these phonetic elements cater to the target audience. In the translation of children’s literature works, translators usually use a large number of reduplicated words, childish sounds, and modal particles at the phonological level [15].

(1) Reduplication

Reduplication often appears in English-Chinese translation. Based on readability of the translation, this linguistic form can also add rhythmic beauty to the text. Reduplicated words are generally divided into the following types: ABB, AAB and ABAB. This phonological beauty can be experienced from the following specific examples [16-17].

①AABB:


Chinese Translation:

“Ta shuo bu xia qu le, tu ran chou chou ye ye de ku le qi lai. ” (Zhou, 2009:35)

②ABB:

Ah! Je me réveille à peine…Je vous demande pardon…*Je suis encore toute décoiffée*…(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:160)

Chinese Translation:

Ah! Wo gang shui xing…… zhen dui bu qi…… tou fa hai shi luan peng peng de……(Zhou, 2009:37)

③AAB:

Petit bonhomme, je veux encore *l'entendre rire*…(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:222)

Chinese Translation:

“ Xiao jia huo, wo hai xiang ting dao ni ge ge de xiao……” (Zhou, 2009:119)

In the Chinese language, reduplication are special language expressions with phonological characteristics. Its unique alliteration and assonance seem like unfolding a meandering stream before readers’ eyes, along with the sound of running water back and forth. Meanwhile, reduplication is also a kind of figurative vocabulary in Chinese [18]. The use of reduplicated words in literary works can narrate objects and access multiple senses [19]. Particularly, reduplication of adjectives, verbs and onomatopoeia...
can bring a dual sensory experience of sight and hearing. This also means that reduplicated words have their own unique iconography, and through the words, the shapes and sounds depicted behind them can be felt [20]. These overlapping forms can induce the imagery behind the semantics, which is exactly cater to children’s figurative thinking [21]. Different from adults, children first focus not on the content of the works, but on their own aesthetic experience. With the dual experience of sensuality and rhythm, reduplicated words are hugely attractive to children. In addition, as far as children’s physiological development is concerned, they have to go through four stages to achieve maturity of their language skills. These include the one-word sentence stage and the two-word sentence stage. In the transition stage between these two, reduplicated words help the combination of words, and smoothly enter the next stage of grammar learning. The phonetic simplification of reduplicated words can also well meet the special needs of children for pronunciation due to immature vocal organs [22].

With many reduplicated words, Z’s translation has taken into account the characteristics of children’s language learning. In particular, extensive onomatopoeic reduplication such as “Ge de xiao” in the above example can arouse children’s interest in reading and help them better understand the meaning of the text through overlapping syllables [23].

(2) Modal Particles

Il me répondit: <<Ben! Voyons!>> comme s’il s’agissait là d’une évidence(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009: 150).

Chinese Translation:


The little prince was really surprised at the pilot’s question: baobob trees certainly could not survive. The translator put two exclamations here to stress his shock and the deserved sttitude so as to convey the prince’s distaste for baobob trees.

It is required to utilize modal particles in children’s literature to express the tone. Since they mostly sense the outside world with perceptual thinking, appropriate intonation between lines helps to build emotional resonance of children audience and establish an invisible bond with the images in works.

In the above analysis of phonetics, we learned that children have special needs for sound attributes such as phonetics and tone. Studies have shown that in the group of child readers, the cognitive and comprehension ability of children aged 0-6 years is limited, and they are more inclined to audio-visualized languages. Literary readings featuring sight and hearing and supplemented by words are easily absorbed by them [24]. To adapt to children’s audio-visualized learning characteristics, Z’s translation successfully attracted children readers’ interest in reading by using phonetic elements such as overlapping reduplicated words, gentle retroflex suffixation voices and emotional modal particles in the linguistic dimension. In today’s new media era, along with the iterative development of media technology, literature gave birth to the production of literature in new media era. This emerging way of production is no longer limited to language narrative, but uses various modern technologies such as language, sound, static and dynamic images to form a cross-media narrative style [25]. This development trend greatly meets the needs of children. Diversified multimedia presentation forms and digital technologies provide children with multiple stimuli in various senses such as hearing, which help to cultivate their problem-solving ability and divergent thinking [26]. This shows that it is necessary for translators of children’s literature in modern times to innovate the way of literary production by taking advantage of the paperless narrative style. Modern translators can draw inspiration from Z’s translation, that is, translated works should pay attention to children’s special needs for sound attributes. At the same time, the new media environment has also helped translators think outside of the box: audiobook platforms such as Himalaya application can be used to realize the audibility of these sound-attributed words, and to transmit the translated texts through multiple senses.

3.1.2. Vocabulary

In terms of pronunciation, to adapt to children’s aesthetic taste, the translator emphasizes the rhythm of the language. While at the vocabulary level, it is necessary to take into account the comprehension ability of children readers, especially their vocabulary. Therefore, translators tend to use concise, colloquial, or even childish languages. For children, oral expressions should be natural, vivid [27] and easy for them to assimilate. In view of the fact that children are mostly exposed to spoken language in their daily life, the use of oral expressions in the translation of children’s literature can make the languages familiar to them. Hence, them can better accept the plot changes and emotional transmission.
in the story.

Or un baobab, si l’on s’y prend trop tard, on ne peut jamais plus s’en débarrasser (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 29009:151).

Chinese Translation:

Er hou mian bao shu zhang de hen kuai, dong shou shao shao yi man, jiu beng xiang zai chu diao ta le (Zhou, 2009:27).

The reserves of language vocabulary mastered by children are relatively small. Their language system is not yet perfect, so they prefer to use colloquial language in daily communication. As can be seen from the above examples, the translator converts the language into colloquial expressions when translating. For example, translating the source sentence “on ne peut jamais plus s’en débarrasser” with typical colloquial words “Beng Xiang” gives the text a sense of intimacy.

Colloquial languages help children to receive information. However, the colloquial expression in the new era has already changed, and buzzwords born of Internet technology has seriously stunted the development of children’s literature translation in the new cultural ecology. There are also commercialized translations, which are full of online vocabulary expressions. For children, such forms of language are not suitable for their language development. Network catchwords is immature in terms of pronunciation and grammar, lacking in cultural connotation, and even endangers children’s language learning and even future growth [28]. If the Internet language is used for translation, the “Beng Xiang” in the translation of example (1) will be translated as “Jiu ken ding liang liang le” and the “Can” in example (2) will be translated as “Bei ju”. Obviously, the colloquial expression in Z’s translation has not been eroded by the emerging languages on the Internet. He has well adapted to children’s reading needs while staying true to his aspiration as a qualified translator of children’s literature. This shows that translators in the new era should follow the normative language expressions and eliminate Internet buzzwords. At the same time, they should use more words rich in cultural connotation and national spirit to create a correct and pure language learning environment for children.

3.1.3. Syntax

The immature physical structure and weak cognitive ability lead to children’s narrow attention span, so they cannot concentrate on the reading materials. Besides, the imperfect physiological structure causes their shortness of breath, which also leads to their reading difficulties (Lin Yanyan, 2014). This shows that translators should pay attention to the inadequacy of children readers’ reading ability and pay attention to the adaptive transformation of grammar and syntax between the two languages. (Baker, 1992). To conform to children’s reading habits, Z’s translation adopted clear and short sentences instead of complex long structures. The following analysis will start from Chinese simple sentences and rhetorical devices.

(1) Chinese Simple Sentences

Or mon petit bonhomme ne me semblait ni égaré, ni mort de fatigue, ni mort de faim, ni mort de soif, ni mort de peur (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:139).

Chinese Translation:

Ke shi zhe ge xiao ren er, kan shang qu bing bu xiang mi lu le, ye bu xiang lei de yao ming, e de yao ming, ke de yao ming huo pa de yao ming (Zhou, 2009:8).

This sentence describes the feeling of the pilot wandering alone in the desert when he meets the little prince for the first time. At that time, he was asked to draw a sheep. It is very rare to meet people in the deserted desert, while the little prince’s equanimity is even more surprising to the pilot. This highlights that the little prince was quite special. The translator described a series of situations of the destitute in the desert in natural and simple everyday terms and explained the dangerous living environment in the desert in a tone close to that of children, creating an intense, immersive and interactive experience. In the original text, the content connected by “ne…ni” can be divided into two aspects: physical and mental states. Zhou listed these two kinds of feelings separately in colloquial words and helped readers to appreciate the context.

(2) Rhetorical Devices

In addition to simple sentence patterns, the use of rhetorical devices is also one of the translators’ adaptive choices at the syntactic level. The anthropomorphic technique is used throughout The Little Prince. The delicate roses, the cunning and sinister snakes, and the clever and sincere foxes all reflect the
concept of animism, that is, the thinking mode of children who do not distinguish between subject and object and intersubjectivity. Although they have self-awareness, they cannot distinguish between the psychological world and the material world by themselves (Wang Mengnan, 2018). Therefore, everything in the world has life. Each grass and tree are possessed with the same mindset and spirit form as human beings. For them, the objective world is characterized by specific images, and the anthropomorphic rhetoric can just shape all kinds of images in texts and convey the romanticism in literary works. Such artistic form is welcomed by children for its complying with their animistic concept. More details will be provided in the following examples.

... mais la fleur n’en finissait pas de se préparer à être belle, à l’abri de sa chambre verte. Elle choisissait avec soin ses couleurs. Elle s’habillait lentement, elle ajustait un à un ses pétale (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:159).

Chinese Translation:

Ke shi zhe duo hua er dai zai lv se de hua e li mian, mo mo ceng ceng de da ban ge mei wan, ta jing xin tao xuan zhe zi ji de van se, man tun tun de chuan shang qi yin, qi pian yi pian de li shun hua ban (Zhou, 2009:36-37).

It depicted the scene when the prince first saw the rose. She is such a charming lady that it is precisely this attractive appearance that instantly captured the little prince’s attention and even his heart. The translator described the rose as a delicate woman so as to stretch children’s imagination and draw their attention during the reading process.

Traditionally, children’s literature translation was printed in written languages. The above analysis shows that, on the one hand, due to special physiological structure, children are all poor readers. Furthermore, there is still room for their cognitive improvement, resulting in inability to concentrate. Faced with these problems, translators could learn from Zhou and use simple sentences and rhetoric devices to add anima to stories. Fortunately, the new media era has already given birth to multi-dimensional sensory media such as audio, video, and images, making a breakthrough on the traditional text printing. In this context, translators can make full use of the advantages of new media to further expand creation forms. Specifically, given children’s special reading demands, the translator should concentrate on all the sensory organs, including auditory and visual senses. It is a good choice to utilize expression forms of images, sound effects and three-dimensional styles. For example, the VR experience born in the new media, combining anthropomorphic rhetoric with three-dimensional animation, allows children readers to deepen their understanding of the characters and plots in all sensory stimulation.

3.2. Adaptive Transformation from the Cultural Dimension

The collision between two different cultures will act on the translator, which illustrates that besides language transformation, the translator should as well pay attention to the whole cultural background behind the translation and carry out the adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension in an effective way (Hu Gengshen, 2004).

There are two major methods for the adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension, namely domestication and foreignization. Compared with adults, children’s language ability, cognitive level and mental development are still immature. With the help of domestication, foreign culture thinking patterns are transformed into familiar mother tongue. In terms of foreignization, this strategy can retain foreign cultural factors, meet the growing aesthetic psychology of seeking discrepancy of children in the new era and further cultural exchanges. At the same time, it is necessary to take children’s features into consideration and ensure that the translated languages are concise and clear, so as not to cause misunderstandings.

Domestication and foreignization supplement each other and bring about excellent translation of children’s literature. More detailed analysis will be conducted through the following examples.

3.2.1. Domestication

(1)<Il faudrait les mettre les uns sur les autres...>> (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:150)

Chinese Translation:

“Na dei rang ta men die luo han le……” (Zhou, 2009:24)

In translation, the unique Chinese expression of “Die luo han” means that people pile themselves one above another, striking many poses. The strategy of domestication can vividly depict the picture of
elephant piling on top of each other. This visual enjoyment is conductive to children’s understanding and association. However, there still exist shortcomings. The cultural image of “Die luo han” may be beyond the cognitive scope of Chinese children and additional information are required to fully convey the meaning. This will result in reading difficulties for target readers. Hence, it is recommended to replace them with more easy-to-understand expressions.

(2) Elle ne voulait pas sortir toute fripée comme les coquelicots (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:159).

Chinese Translation:
Ta bu yuan xiang yu mei ren yi yang jiu shi man lian zhou wen (Zhou, 2009:37).

In the original language, the word coquelicots refers to the poppy family that grows in the northern hemisphere. Zhou translated it as a native plant corn poppy, whose petals are as thin as velvet, swaying lightly without wind. This beauty is easy to be accepted by domestic children readers and could arouse their desire to explore the nature. The corn poppy is also a cultural image, full of romanticism, which is productive for the exaltation of children’s artistic aesthetic taste and get to know traditional Chinese culture. However, from a critical point of view, corn poppies are not common in daily life, and will result in disturbance of comprehension for children. In addition, for younger children, more reading guidance is required to achieve the transmission of cultural connotation behind the plant image. Therefore, it may get half the results with twice the effort, suppressing readers’ interests and failing to realize the original artistic effect.

3.2.2. Foreignization

Lorsque j’étais petit garçon, la lumière de l’arbre de Noël, la musique de la messe de minuit, la douceur des sourires faisaient ainsi tout le rayonnement du cadeau de Noël que je recevais(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:215).

Chinese Translation:
Dang wo shi ge xiao nan hai shi, sheng dan shu de deng huang, wu ye mi sa de yin yue, ren men tian mi de wei xiao, dou ceng xiang zhe yang hui ying zhe wo shou dao de sheng dan li wu, rang ta yi yi fa guang (Zhou, 2009:111).

The translator chose the foreignization strategy to preserve the cultural factors of Christmas in western countries. In a world of globalization, Chinese children are no longer blind to western festivals, let alone the well-renowned Santa Claus. This strategy is used to enrich children’s knowledge, place themselves in a diversified world and meet the needs of this era.

The developing media in this new age has further strengthened the trend of globalization. On account of this, cultural exchanges around the world has deepened and are characterized by coexistence of multi-ethnic cultures (Zhan Aibin, 2019). Meanwhile, brand new reading demands present in children readers. The writing purpose of “child-centered” asks for continued innovation and creation in translators. Zhou’s translation complies with this requirement well, taking advantage of foreignization to retain cultural elements of Western Christmas. This not only satisfy children’s curiosity, but also fulfills a translator’s responsibility of promoting cultural exchanges and respond to the country’s call for talents with international vision.

With the improving modern technology, cultural globalization was generated from the collision and integration of various cultures (Liu Fan, 2019). This is of positive significance for the adaptive development of Chinese children’s literature translation in the new era, but there is latent crisis as well. Nowadays, all kinds of cultures have to join in the fierce competition with heterogeneous cultures. Among them, the weak ones are bound to be squeezed out. This is a big challenge for the growth of children’s literature in China. According to research, literary works with national characteristics have not been well developed. In such a crisis, translators of children’s literature as bridges between cultures should establish self-confidence and awareness of their cultures, gain an intimate knowledge of their national cultures, and draw on strengths of others. The choice of Zhou to translate the world-famous The Little Prince introduced the values of universal significance from the source text and the unique cultures of foreign countries. This practice is worth learning by all the children’s literature translators. In addition, translators should learn the flexible use of domestication and add elements rich in cultures and national spirit to their works. On top of that, translators need to draw useful lessons from Zhou’s version. To manipulate domestication, translators should avoid rare cultural images and start with children’s cognitive ability and literary attainments. The effective function of domestication could on the one hand, transform foreign literature into reading materials suitable for children in the target culture, and at the
same time provides cultural edification for domestic children, which helps to cultivate new-age children rooted in China’s excellent cultural traditions.

3.3. Adaptive Transformation from the Communicative Dimension

The third dimension of three-dimensional transformation focuses on the communicative intent of the original text, and aims to ensure its effective transmission (Hu Gengshen, 2008: 11-16). Translation is also a communicative activity. The source text could communicate with the target readers because the translator builds a specific context in the form of a story (Xu Derong, 2004: 33-36). Therefore, it is important for the translator to accurately convey the meanings of source text for the child readers. The following is a detailed analysis from the communicative dimension.

1. “Les épines, ça ne sert à rien, c’est de la pure méchanceté de la part des fleurs!” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2009:156)

Chinese Translation:
“Ci ya, shen me yong dou mei you, chun cui shi hua er xiang shi huai bei.” (Zhou, 2009:32)

The original meaning of méchanceté can be stingy or mean. If translated in this way, it will have a derogatory meaning, which does not conform to the image of the flower in the source text. While Zhou translated it as “Shi huai”, meaning play a trick, adding the character of naughty to the flower. The innocent girl figure is in accordance with the style of children’s literature.


Chinese Translation:
“Wo he yi duo hua er nao le bie niu,” xiao wang zi shuo. (Zhou, 2009:82)

One of the main themes of The Little Prince is responsibility and love. All the precious time and energy devoted to the rose made it special and irreplaceable for the little prince. The two are closely connected to each other due to love and responsibility. In the original text, “difficulté” means having difficulty getting along with someone. While the translator took into account the unique relationship between the little prince and the rose, and translated the word as “Nao le bie niu”, that is to say, bickering over something that will not ruin the relationship at all. The translation also implied that the little prince would leave the indifferent earth and return to his beloved rose in the end. The emotional tone of the translated language was a full demonstration of the psychology of characters, which could create emotional resonance of children readers.

From the above analysis, we can see that Zhou’s translation had a delicate grasp of languages and themes, creating a good reading atmosphere for children readers. With fluent reading experience and quiet thinking space, children are able to explore the real world and think outside of the box. This is the charm of traditional paper reading.

The media in this era concentrates on audio-visual communication means. Children enjoy multiple sensory stimulation owing to these advanced technologies. We will not deny them. But the information explosion and complicated reading materials breed the shallow reading (Yang Jianlong, 2013). This new reading habit focuses on pictures, videos, and audio players, making it hard for deep thinking (Zhang Yingying, 2019). While books in written form depending on profound thinking gradually fade away. The superficial information transfer slashes the value of deep reading and the cultural field of thinking for children’s literature (Pan Ying, 2020). In fact, paper readings boast their roles in promoting emotion regulation and logical thinking. Neil Postman (2015) stressed that deep reading required investment of time and patience and it could exercise logical and organized mindset. These advantages are not available to entertainment-oriented shallow reading in the new media age. It is worthwhile to learn from Zhou’s attitude to literary works, including meticulous selection of words and his excellent translation skills. In light of children’s demands, Zhou’s translation highlighted the description of images and emotions and gave readers time and space for deep thinking in ways that exert a subtle and positive influence on children.

4. Findings

In the first place, the above analysis emphasized the translator’s sense of responsibility. Therefore, beginners of translation can learn that qualified translators should draw the baseline and present the main
idea of the original texts for target readers. To achieve this, translators need to improve their language competence and literacy. From a macro perspective, in the new media age, cultural globalization promotes the integration of different cultures. Currently, Chinese works with national characteristics have not yet give full play to their strengths. At the micro level, taste of children readers keeps pace with the changing world. Therefore, translators are supposed to adhere to the concept of literature with Chinese characteristics, establish cultural awareness and confidence and adapt the works to the needs of the times.

Secondly, it is easy to see that a professional translator knows very well at least two different languages and cultures and integrates multidisciplinary knowledge such as children’s psychology, physical development, and phonological art into translation. This can enlighten translation educators that it is crucial to keep enrich teaching materials and promote integrated research between adjacent disciplines. Besides, eco-translatology underlines the coordination of translators and the ecological environment of translation. As cultural ecology changes, various new media have intruded into the traditional translation ecology. That means translators should make active adjustment on translation techniques and realize the social value of translated works in the new age.

5. Conclusion

The rapid development of new media has injected new vitality into the traditional cultural ecological environment, and the translation of children’s literature in the new cultural ecology is also undergoing profound changes. Starting from the new perspective of eco-translatology, this paper uses methods of three-dimensional transformation of eco-translatology to analyze the childish language in the excellent Chinese translation of *The Little Prince* from three aspects: language, culture, and communication. It demonstrates the outstanding translator’s proficiency in writing through children’s special reading demands on language learning, aesthetic appreciation, psychological development and thinking mode. Moreover, both the translation mindset and translators’ sense of responsibility are explored in the above text. The ultimate purpose of the research is to discover new development trends of the new media age and to adapt to the new requirements of dynamic translation ecology for ease of providing reference for beginners in translation, translation researchers and educators.

References