Original Research Article

A Study on Subtitle Translation of Empresses in the Palace from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

Chinese films and TV attract global audience in recent years, as is the case of *Empresses in the Palace*, the subtitle translation of which plays an important role. This paper attempts to make a case study of the TV drama *Empresses in the Palace* from the perspective of Eco-translatology. By exploring how the three-dimensional transformations are applied in its subtitle translation based on the statistical results, the paper aims to bring more enlightenment to China's film industry by discussing the practical translation methods and techniques. It can be concluded that translators need adapt to the translational environment and make adaptive selections for different dimensions of the subtitle translation.

Keywords: Eco-translatology; *Empresses in the Palace;* Eco-translatology; Three-dimensional Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

As a culture carrier, films and TV plays act as one of the main cultural expressions. Therefore, their subtitle translation help promote cultural exchange and communication. However, English-Chinese translation have taken up a predominant proportion within the subtitle translation field until recent years when C-E translation for the export of outstanding Chinese films and TV plays begin to increase. Among these, a classic and exemplary TV series, *Empresses in the Palace* went global successfully and won much appraise overseas. The TV series is an epic tale set in the 18th century during the Qing Dynasty unfolding the life story of Zhen Huan, emperor Yong Zheng's favorite woman who rises from a concubine up to the empress.

Subtitle translation is defined as "a translation practice that consists of rendering in writing, usually at the bottom of the screen, the translation into a target language of the original dialogue exchanges uttered by different speakers [1]". It is also "the reading in a different language of verbal message in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text, presented on the screen in synch with the original verbal message [2]". The main role for subtitling is to facilitate an access for the foreign viewers on audiovisual product in a foreign language [3]. In the 21st century, interdisciplinary studies on subtitle translation emerged and quickly became a hot focus. Jorge Diaz and Gunilla Anderman edited and published "Audiovisual Translation": Language Transfer on Screen including 17 scholars' research papers as a systematic and in-depth study of film and television translation from different theoretical perspectives. These essays reflect the latest research results on film and television translation in the West [4].

In China, the theory of eco-translatology is frequently applied to subtitle translation studies. Among the 28 pieces of literature on the subtitle translation of *Empresses in the Palace*, eco-translatology is adopted up to 6 times, which is the most frequently used theory. Other theories adopted include: functional equivalence theory, skopos theory, register theory, intertextuality theory, reception aesthetic and relevance theory. Among the 6 studies under the theoretical framework of eco-translatology, Yang Jiao [5] focuses on the cultural-loaded words with six typical examples; based on translator's subjectivity, Mao Lurong [6] discusses the different roles the translator plays in the translation text from the three dimensions of language, culture and communication. Yuan Chunbo [7] briefly analyzes the strength and weakness of the translation text with 12 examples, using three-dimensional transformation method. Wang Jigui [8] explores the translation of subtitles of ancient poetry in the play with three examples. Although these documents have different focuses, they all emphasize the flexible application of three-dimensional transformation. However, those

studies take a relatively small number of typical examples as their analysis target without statistical data.

According to eco-translatology, the act of translation is a transformation in three dimensions, i.e. linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension. This paper aims to figure out how linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensional transformation is applied and what translation techniques and methods tend to be employed in each dimension in the subtitle of *Empresses in the Palace* through statistics and analysis. By calculating different techniques and methods in different dimensions, the writer hopes that more subtitle translators could use proper techniques and methods when the three-dimensional transformation is applied during translation to produce more high-qualified subtitle translation texts to foreign markets.

The Theory of Eco-Translatology

The theory of eco-translatology, first proposed by Chinese scholar Prof. Hu Gengshen at the beginning of the 21st century in China, is a comprehensive study of translation from an ecological perspective. It is a manifestation of the transformation of social civilization in translation studies as well as the inevitable result of the transformation of modern philosophy [9]. The traditional Chinese ecological wisdom such as "harmony between man and nature"

and "middle of the road" serves as the starting point for the concept of eco-translatology. The main concepts in eco-translatology are introduced here.

Translational Eco-environment

Based on Hu Gengshen's definition, a "translational eco-environment" refers to all external environments that possibly influence the survival and development of the subject of translation. The "subject" means all the life beings participating in the translation activity, including authors, clients, and readers. "External environments" refer to the natural and economic environment, the linguistic and cultural environment, and the social and political environment related to the translation activity, which is composed of various natural and humanistic elements [9]. In terms of translation, all elements except for the translator can be regarded as the "translational eco-environment" [9].

Adaption and Selection

Eco-translatology emphasizes on "translator centeredness" during translation. The "centeredness" means that during translating, the translators first are supposed to adapt to the translational eco-environments, and then they should select the proper translation in accordance with the eco-environments, which is referred as "selective adaption" and "adaptive selection" [10]. (See Fig.1).
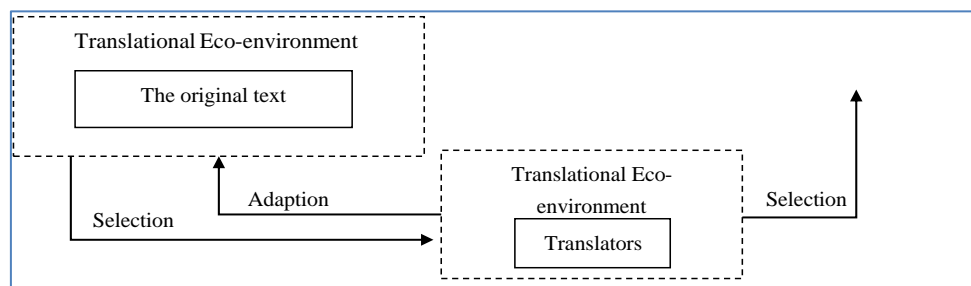

Fig-1

Translation is described as an alternating cycle of adaption and selection. The internal relationship of this cycle is: the purpose of adaption is to survive, the means of it is to select; and the law of selection is to "eliminate the weak and retain the strong". The criteria of translation criticism can also be expressed from the perspective of "adaption and selection": the best adaption is selective adaption; the best selection is adaptive selection; the best translation is the translation with the highest degree of holistic adaption and selection, which is also under the principle of multidimensional integration [11].

Three-dimensional Transformation

Eco-translatology advocates "three-dimensional transformation", which means the adaptive selection and transformation of language, culture and communication on the basis of "multi-dimensional adaption and adaptive selection" [9].

In linguistic dimension, the transformation refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of the content related to language, such as lexis, syntax, grammar, figure of speech, writing style and so on. *Empresses in the Palace* is an ancient Chinese palace drama with unique lines, which contains a large number of ancient poems and proverbs. Christian Nord [12] pointed out that Chinese is a typical analytical language, while English is a synthetic language with inflections. Due to the differences between Chinese and English, it is necessary to change the language form to convey the translation information more accurately at the sentence level.

In cultural dimension, the transformation means that the translator pays more attention to explaining and conveying the cultural connotation meaning of different languages in translation activities. Because of the cultural differences between source

languages and target languages, the translator should pay attention to the entire cultural system to which different languages belong during the translation process. They also should be aware of the cross-cultural exchange activity and recognize the importance of balancing ecological culture between different languages [13].

In communicative dimension, the transformation emphasizes the communicative purpose or intention between different languages during the translation process. The translator thereby makes the adaptive selection and transformation. In addition to the

factors that affect language and culture, it requires translators to realize the communicative intention in the original text.

According to the sequence chain proposed by Hu Gengshen (fig.1), the translation environment is a complex one composed of multiple dimensions and elements [14]. Therefore, when a translator starts translation work, he or she is restricted by multiple factors but he or she should actively initiate the three-dimensional transformation to improve the quality of the text. (See fig.2).
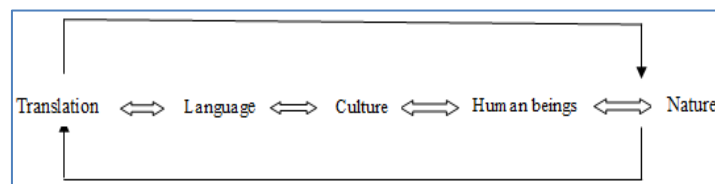

Translation ⟺ Language ⟺ Culture ⟺ Human beings ⟺ Nature

Fig-2

Based on the above theoretical framework, it can be found that the method of three-dimensional transformation is under the principle of adaption and selection. The "linguistic dimensional adaptive selection and transformation" means that the translators' adaptive selections at linguistic level. The "cultural dimensional adaptive selection and transformation" requires the consideration of cultural factors by selection. The "communicative dimensional adaptive selection and transformation" refers to the adaptive selection and transformation on bilingual communicative intention during translation.

RESEARCH METHODS
This paper combines the qualitative method with the quantitative method to make a case study of the subtitle translation of *Empresses in the Palace* under the theoretical framework of the three-dimensional transformation principle of eco-translatology. Statistical calculation is conducted to present the specific frequency of translation techniques and methods applied in each transform dimension. Then descriptive analysis is followed to find out what translation techniques and methods are applied in every dimension and whether they contribute to the balance of the translational eco-environment of this drama.

Empresses in the Palace is produced into six episodes of TV series, each episode lasting 90 minutes and containing more than 1200 lines. First, all the lines in every episode are extracted by subtitle extracting software. Then in each episode, 30 cases for each dimension, i.e. 90 cases with typical features related to each dimension are chosen, that is, a total of 540 cases in all the six episodes, which means for each dimension 180 cases are chosen for analysis.

The cases are chosen for linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions based on their basic features, main functions or connotations of the original lines. Ancient Chinese poetry or classic proverbs are chosen for linguistic dimension as they display more typical Chinese linguistic features; cases containing unique Chinese cultural images, historical figures and allusions are picked for cultural dimension; in communicative dimension, the lines picked all serve for the communicative purposes or intentions from dialogues. In these three dimensions, every translation technique or method is recorded and calculated respectively. Translation techniques of amplification, omission and reconstruction are considered in linguistic dimension; equally, domestication and foreignization strategies are studied in cultural dimension and free translation and literal translation are researched in communicative dimension.

Then, the frequency of translation techniques and methods applied in each dimension is presented with specific statistics and graphics. After building an analytical framework, the paper further makes case analysis and provides suggestions for other subtitle translators to maintain the harmony of the translational eco-environment.

STATISTICAL RESULTS
Frequencies of translation strategies, techniques and methods applied in each dimension are illustrated with tables and charts in this part. 180 examples are given in each dimension based on their basic features, main functions or connotations of the original lines.

The Frequency of Translation Techniques Applied in Linguistic Dimension
The statistical results for translation in linguistic dimension are in table 1.

Table-1: Translation Techniques Adopted in Linguistic Dimension

Components Number Techniques	Subject	Predicate	Object	Attribute	Complement	Adverbial	Total
amplification	18	14	22	8	5	2	69
omission	17	3	20	5	8	3	56
reconstruction	35						35
others	20						20

In linguistic dimension, amplification is used for 69 times in 180 cases, taking up 38%. Omission are used for 56 times, accounting for 31%. Reconstruction and other techniques are for 35 and 20 times, accounting for 20% and 11% respectively. More specifically, amplification is further subdivided into adding different sentence components, namely subject (18 times, 26%), predicate (14 times, 20%), object (22 times, 32%), attribute (8 times, 12%), complement (5 times, 7%) and adverbial (twice, 3%). Equally, omission in terms of subject is for 17 times, 31%; predicate 3 times, 5%; object 20 times, 36%; attribute 5 times, 9%; complement 8 times, 14% and adverbial 3 times, 5%.
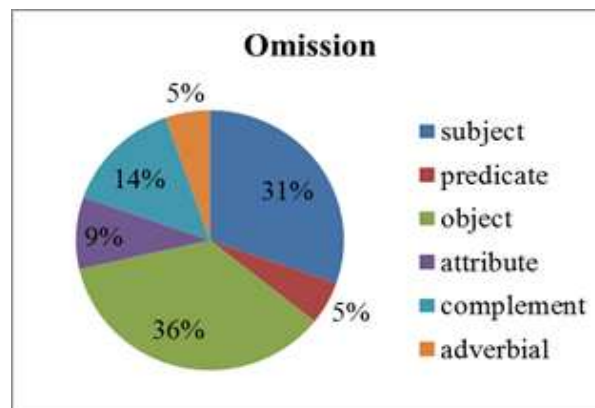
Pie charts are also made to show the specific proportions of different sentence elements for each translation techniques shown in the following charts.
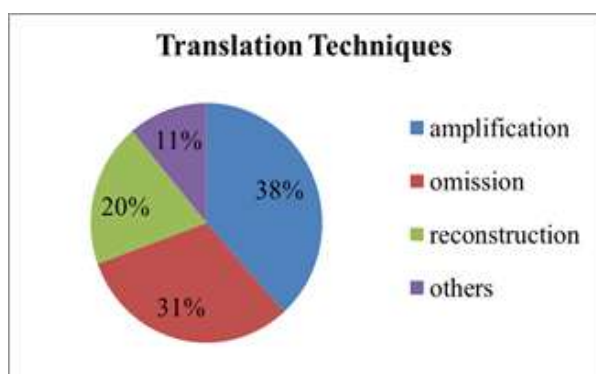

Chart-1

Chart-2

Chart 3

While amplification is most frequently used in linguistic dimension, chart 2 shows adding to objects (32%), subjects (26%) and predicate (20%) are the two most adopted to make linguistic adjustment. Chart 3 shows objects and subjects are most frequently omitted to make linguistic adjustment.

The Frequency of Translation Strategies Applied in Cultural Dimension

In cultural dimension, the strategies of domestication and foreignization are mainly used to cope with the problems of cultural conflicts. The statistical results are shown in table 2.

Table-2: Translation Strategies Adopted in Cultural Dimension

Translation Strategies	Amount	Percentage
domestication	156	86.7%
foreignization	24	13.3%

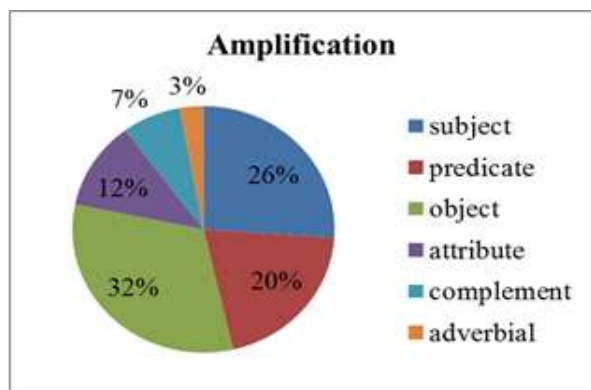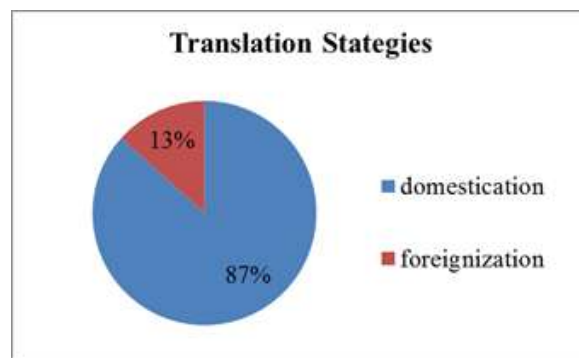**Chart-4**

From the above results it is shown that in the 180 cases of cultural dimension, domestication strategy is used for 156 times, making up 86.7%. Foreignization is for 24 times, the proportion of which is 13.3% (See chart 4). The statistics demonstrate that domestication acts as the main way to deal with the cultural problems in translation as it makes it easier for the audience to understand the plots of the TV drama.

The Frequency of Translation Methods Applied in Communicative Dimension

In communicative dimension, free translation and literal translation are used to make the lines function accurately. Through counting these methods in 180 cases, the table and chart are presented as follows:

Table-3: Translation Methods Adopted in Communicative Dimension

Translation Methods	Amount	Percentage
free translation	168	93.3%
literal translation	12	6.7%

Table 3 shows that free translation is applied for 168 times in the 180 cases in terms of communicative dimension, making up 93.3%. Literal translation is for 12 times, accounting for 6.7%. From the results, it is shown that free translation accounts for over 90% of the total, meaning that free translation in film translation is more advisable than literal translation. To convey the communicative intentions in a dialogue better, free translation is more flexible and effective. (See chart 5)
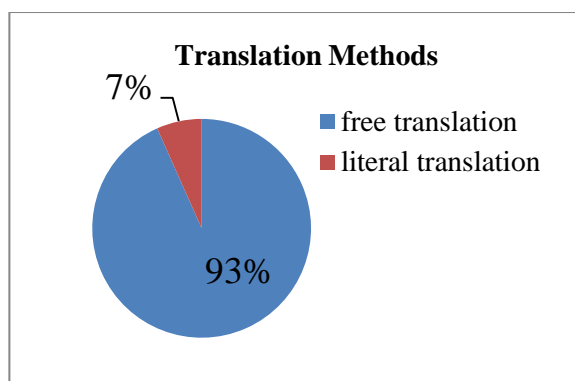

Chart-5

DISCUSSION

The statistical results show that in different dimensions, translators tend to apply different translation strategies, techniques and methods to realize dimensional transformation. In this part, typical cases are analyzed to approve statistical results from above. In addition, unsatisfactory translation is also discussed and suggestions are presented.

Linguistic Dimensional Transformation and Related Translation Techniques

Christian Nord [12] pointed out that Chinese is a typical analytical language, while English is a synthetic language with inflections. English mainly employs hypotaxis while Chinese employs parataxis, which is one of the most distinguished differences between the two languages. Therefore, it is necessary to change the language form to convey the translation information more accurately at the sentence level. From the above statistical results, it is shown that amplification (38%), omission (31%) and reconstruction (20%) are frequently used techniques in linguistic dimension. The following six cases apply such techniques respectively.

(1)花开堪折直须折
One must pick a flower at the prime of its bloom.
莫待无花空折枝
Do not wait until the blossoms fade and fall.

In this case, the translator uses amplification, adding the subject "one" here.

These sentences originated from the poetry Golden Embroidered Garments. In the play, the heroine Zhen Huan pointed out its meaning was to "advise us to cherish what we have". The original Chinese sentences are typically analytical here, with the subject "flower" and the verb "pick". Yet the real subject of the verb "pick" is actually a person. Therefore, after the translator understand the connotations of this poem and successfully realize selective adaption in source language's eco-environment, the real subject "one" is added to make correct adaptive selection, making the sentence of English, a synthetic language, clear and complete.

(2)年年岁岁花相似
Each year and every year, the blossoms return anew.
岁岁年年人不同
Each year and every year, the blossom of youth does not.

Here, reconstruction is used to transform the attribute in Chinese into a predicate in English.

These sentences originated from the poems written by Liu Xiyi, a poet of Tang Dynasty. They intend to convey the feeling of changing of people and the passing of time. The flowers still look similar, but people are not the original ones. Time is gone forever. In the source language, the subjects are "flowers" and "people" respectively while "similar" and "different" are adjectives. Because of the huge difference between English and Chinese, one employing hypotaxis while the other employing parataxis, it is improper to translate the sentences word by word, which will make the target language illogical, failing to realize an adaptive selection in the ecological environment of the target language. Therefore, the attribute in Chinese are transformed into the predicate "return", making the target language logical and to some extent convey the beauty of "sound, form and meaning" just as source language do.

(3)从前是人为刀俎我为鱼肉
In the past I was subjected to cruel oppression.
今时今日也该换一换了
It is time to change that situation.

In this case, amplification is adopted, adding the object of "situation" to complete the targeted language.

As English mainly features hypotaxis while Chinese features parataxis [12], some certain sentence components are required to be added to keep the completeness of the language. Here in source language the object of "change" is unnecessary and unimportant while in English it is an integral part in a sentence. Through adding the object, the translated texts can survive better in the target language's ecology.

Due to the parataxis of Chinese and the hypotaxis of English, amplification and omission are also used quite a lot to balance the different environment between these two languages. Hence, the translators are suggested to make changes on the subjects and objects during translation more as well as other sentence components.

Cultural Dimensional Transformation and Related Translation Strategies

In cultural dimension, the transformation means that the translator pays more attention to explaining and conveying the cultural connotation meaning of different languages in translation activities. The translator should pay more attention to the entire cultural system to which different languages belong during the translation process.

From above statistics, it is known that the strategies of domestication and foreignization are mainly used. The six cases in cultural dimension are as follows.

(1) 天下有多少女子希望自己能够入选, 好一家子鸡犬升天
Every girl wished to be selected so that the whole family could rise up through her success.

In this case, domestication is applied with the image of chicken omitted. In Chinese, dogs are generally considered as negative images in language, referring to a loser or coward. The combination of dogs and chicken also shows derogatory attitude. However, there is no such implication in English. Therefore, in order to adapt to the target language's eco-environment, the strategy of domestication is adopted to express the actual meaning of "鸡犬升天".

(2)嫔妾愿为娘娘效犬马之劳
I will gladly do my utmost to make peace between His Majesty and my lady.

Here, the translator uses domestication to express the meaning directly, omitting the images in Chinese. Dogs and horses are combined in the Chinese idiom to convey the speaker's willingness to be driven and to serve the emperor, just like a dog or a horse. In ancient China, dogs and horses were domesticated to help the owners to housekeep and slave away in the fields. They always submit to their owners. In addition, the concrete meaning of "犬马之劳" is clearly translated as "make peace", which is also an adaption to English eco-environment.

(3)再过几日就是月二龙抬头的日子了
In a few days, it will be the Spring Dragon Festival.

俗话说月二龙抬头
It is said "when the dragon raises its head,
大仓满小仓流啊
abundant harvests of crops are promised ahead."

In this case, "龙" is translated as the dragon, which is also through domestication. However, here foreignization is suggested to use to translate it as "Loong", avoiding the cruel image of dragon in western culture.

In Chinese culture, dragon symbolizes the return of spring and the recovery of all things. Farming is also just around the corner and everything is new. Spring Dragon Festival is for people to pray for a harvest. In the traditional Chinese legend, the dragon can make clouds and rain, which is directly related to the harvest of crops. Yet the images of dragon in China and western world is hugely different, one symbolizing gods and the other devils. Because there is no satisfactory equivalent in English, the writer suggests translating it as "Loong" through foreignization, which can be regarded as the traditional Chinese dragon.

Communicative Dimensional Transformation and Related Translation Methods

In communicative dimension, the transformation emphasizes the communicative purpose or intention between different languages during the translation process. From the above statistical results, it is found that the translator mainly applies free translation and literal translation. The following cases are the typical examples where literal translation and free translation are applied in communicative dimension.

(1)姐姐真是的
Huan, really.
出了这么大的事情也不告诉我
What an awful thing. Why did you hide it from me?

In this case, as there is the corresponding word "really" for "真是的", literal translation here is a proper method to use.

With the help of plot and picture information, the play conveys the communicative intention of the characters. Here, as one of Zhen Huan's good friends, An Lingrong slightly blames Zhen Huan for her not telling her the truth. "真是的" is a common informal and colloquial words in Chinese. Considering its communicative function in the original language's eco-environment, the translator applies literal translation to transform it into an equivalent oral word in English: really. These two simple words exactly convey the same communicative intentions from the speaker with a high degree of adaption and selection.

(2)是嫔妾当日目光短浅
It's my own fault for being so shortsighted.
不知学良禽择佳木而栖
I should have chosen a better master. To my chagrin, I chose wrongly.

In this case, free translation is adopted to better adapt to the target language's eco-environment.

These two lines are the Noble Lady of Cao's words. Here the "佳木" means Zhen Huan. Still, the translator first accurately understands the implications lie in Cao's words, adapting to the translational environment, then uses free translation, selecting a proper text without directly translate "良禽" and "佳木". "To my chagrin" reflects the speaker's submission to Zhen Huan, better promoting the development of the plot and allowing the audience to have a deeper understanding.

(3)岂有此理
Nonsense!
什么叫应该
What are you suggesting?

As a strong interrogative sentence in oral language, to convey the meaning of the words is the priority. Hence, the translator uses free translation to realize the communicative intention goal of the lines.

These lines are the Emperor's words to the abbess. "岂有此理" means things are too unreasonable and the speaker is usually angry. Here the concise word "nonsense" is used to replace the longer word "unreasonable", conveying the Emperor's anger more directly and stronger. The next line "什么叫应该" isn't translated literally but expressed as "What are you suggesting", which is a common oral words in English eco-environment. Free translation is also applied here to make a better adaptive selection.

When it comes to film subtitle translation, the translator should not only consider the communication eco-environment of different languages, but also present the communicative intention. They also need to consider the comprehensive requirements of film subtitles. Hence, as a flexible and effective way, free translation can better convey the communicative

intentions in a dialogue, which can be considered as the first choice when doing such translation.

CONCLUSION

Through quantitative and qualitative study, the paper summarizes what translation strategies, techniques and methods are used frequently when the three-dimensional transformation is applied in different dimensions. First in linguistic dimension, from the statistical results it can be seen that various translation strategies, techniques and methods are used while reconstruction and amplification are most frequently used ones. Second, in cultural dimension, the statistics demonstrate that domestication is used much more frequently than foreignization, suggesting translators that domestication can be considered as the first choice when cultural problems involved. Third, in communicative dimension, it is found that free translation is much more common than literal translation. Overall, the translator's performance serves the harmony of the translational eco-environment and complies with eco-translatology. The translated version can be viewed as one with a high degree of holistic adaptation and selection. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that during the translation process, the three-dimensional transformations are all supposed to be considered at the same time, although certain cases mainly feature one or two dimensions. Still, the translators should shoulder the responsibility to trade off all the factors in the three dimensions to produce a version with the highest degree of holistic adaption and selection.

In terms of the limitations of this study, first, the overall theoretical framework of eco-translatology remains to be improved. Second, the writer's understanding and analysis of English is still far from that of native speakers, which may lead to the writer's neglect of translator's adaptive transformation in the case study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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