

## RENDERING MOVIES THROUGH THE PRISM OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY (BASED UPON THE UKRAINIAN DUBBED TRANSLATIONS OF *OPPENHEIMER* AND *BARBIE*)

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**Abstract:** The paper examines eco-translatology in the context of film translation from English into Ukrainian. Its primary aim is to apply an eco-translational approach to audiovisual translation and to identify the linguistic, cultural and communicative shifts that emerge in the process. The study analyzes two of the best-selling films of the 21st century – *Oppenheimer* by Christopher Nolan and *Barbie* by Greta Gerwig – along with their Ukrainian dubbed versions. The research employs comparative and quantitative content analysis, culture-oriented and translation-focused methods and draws on the core principle of eco-translatology: the holistic perspective. The findings highlight the interdependence of translation, language, culture, humans and nature as integral elements of a unified process of transferring meaning from the source text to the target text.

**Keywords:** eco-translatology; holistic perspective; translational eco-environment; *Oppenheimer*; *Barbie*; translation shifts; cultural adaption

### 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century tends to be when more and more works on translation touch upon the complicated topic of the translator's individuality in the translation process. Thus, this issue requires a multidisciplinary approach. The flow of linguistics into psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics and eco-linguistics puts forward the notion of anthropocentrism in the process of translation (Cronin 2017). It switches us from the

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problems of reaching equivalency and adequacy to wider questions of intercultural communication and pragmatic aspects of language functioning. The understanding of the language itself is now undergoing the enormous process of change and many linguists (Hodges and Fowler 2010) do not treat a language as a closed system of symbols but as an open, dynamic eco-system (Cowley 2009), the functioning of which is a sociocultural, context-dependent and interlinear process. Nowadays, the translator provides not only for the linguistic compliance but he/she is also responsible for international safety.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Delineating ecological translation presupposes an understanding of language ecology, especially considering its holistic perspective (Mühlhäusler 2000: 306) and Darwinian principle (Diamanti 2022: 185). The eco-translation theory has caught the attention of different scholars even before its recognition. Newmark (1988) pointed out the main directions for translation: selections and decisions of the source text. Lefevere (1992) touched on the question of translation context that should be equal to the cultural environment. Valdeon (2004) suggested that eco-translatology acts as an example of a newborn paradigm with huge potential for further research. Wang (2011) held that eco-translatology focuses on the integrity of translation and adherence to translator-centeredness. Dollerup (2011) supported the theory that eco-translatology is in connection with three prominent Western theories: Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence, Toury's descriptive translation studies and Vermeer's Skopos theory. Diamanti (2022) supports the idea of ecological translation as a result of cognitive and ethical practice aimed at metonymic density, focusing on the linguistic structures that characterize the source text (ST) and preserving them by avoiding a language shift into the target text (TT). Cronin emphasized the connection between translation and environment after entering the Age of Anthropology, adding that translation between languages has to keep a 'healthy balance' (Cronin 2017: 68). Based on the scholar's opinion, translation – as a set of ideas and practices – occupies a central place in investigating the connection between humans and nature, and keeping the translation process separate from ecological changes is irrational. The translators and the translation process itself do not exist in isolation, they are considered to be an integral part of the environment. Cronin identifies three potential principles that are considered to be the basis of eco-translatology: place, resilience and relatedness (Cronin 2017: 14).

Following Darwinian ideas of evolution, Hu describes translation as “cyclical alterations of the translator's adaptation and selection” within a given ‘translational eco-environment’ (Hu 2004: 24). A translation as a final outcome is aimed to become part of the recipient's cultural repertoire and create new models, as at the hub of the translating process is an idea of creating a positive effect on the environment (Badenes 2015: 358). Hu also highlights the macroscopic eco-reason of eco-translatology that puts forward diversity, ethics, dynamics, balance, wholeness, relevance and eco-aesthetics (Hu 2020). Eco-translatology studies the translation process not from the

idea ‘why’ but from the perspective ‘how.’ This subfield locates the translator at the centre of the process and favours sustaining ecological integrity. From being static and passive, the translator becomes flexible and active. Translator-centeredness is the main notion of eco-translatology as it emphasizes the initiative and subjective role of the translator (Wang 2013). Guo highlights the translational behaviour as it is analysed from an author-centered perspective. The translator makes this or that decision because of the translational eco-environment (Guo 2025).

The translation process not only focuses on ecological elements in the ST but also creates ecological awareness in the recipients of the TT. Hu and Tao introduced four principles of eco-translatology: 1) balance and harmony; 2) multiple eco-integration; 3) symbolism and diversity; 4) translator’s responsibility (Hu and Tao 2016: 127-128). Following the issue of translator’s responsibility and visibility within the framework of eco-translatology, Hu singled out that the translation process consists of two main stages:

The 1<sup>st</sup> stage: the translational eco-environment selects the translator, so the translator adapts to the ST and SL eco-environment. At this stage, there is a deep analysis of SL, TL, the addresser, the addressee, the translator and the readers.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage: the translator (who is already responsible for the eco-environment) starts selecting proper translation strategies and decides on the form of the final target text within the sphere of the restriction. SL and TL are two different ecosystems; thus, the greater difference between the ecological environment is that the lower level of translatability is visible (Hu 2004).

The selection is done on the macro level, where the translator faces the most challenging matter if domestication is better than foreignization, and his/her choice is adapted to the translation environment. The final decisions on TT are made on a micro level after considering all of the factors in the eco-environment.

Eco-translatology takes into account three main strategies to reach accuracy: language, culture, communication (Hu 2020), which gives the opportunity to achieve optimal translation. Translation as a process is a transformation of languages and the language itself is an inseparable part of culture (ibid.). The sequence chain of eco-translatology can be seen in the following interrelations:

***Translation ⇔ Language ⇔ Culture ⇔ Human ⇔ Nature***

As part of nature, human beings’ prolonged activities produce culture, and culture is transmitted through the prism of language, and language is the reservoir of cultural information and cultural storage. Moreover, they cannot exist separately as they are essential aspects of translation. Language balances culture, while culture balances the mix of culture and ecology, and communication balances the bilingual intention: linguistic dimension – adjusting language form and style (vocabulary, syntax, idioms) to suit TL norms; cultural dimension – conveying or modifying cultural connotations so the translation is relevant and acceptable to the target culture; communicative dimension – recreating the author’s intent and the text’s pragmatic effect for the target audience, ensuring the translation fulfils the intended function in the new context. The translator is not a passive conduit but a ‘shuttler’ between ecosystems who must grasp the original text and gain a new identity in the target culture through adaptive choices.

Translating films and audiovisual media introduces additional layers of complexity, but the eco-translatological principles of adaptation and selection remain highly relevant. In film translation, the translator must account for extra-linguistic factors – visuals on screen, characters’ mouth movements, timing, intonation, and soundtrack – which form part of the ‘ecological environment’ of the movie. The goal is not only to translate a dialogue, but to integrate it seamlessly into the audiovisual whole, creating an equivalent viewer experience. This often demands even more creativity and intervention from translators. As Weston observes in her study of Ukrainian film dubbing, “film translation frequently requires lexical adjustments by the translator in order to maintain the original context or to establish the desired emotional connection with the audience” (Weston 2022: 4). In eco-translatology terms, the translator must adapt the script to the target audience’s cognitive and emotional environment and then select phrasing that fits both the cultural context and the technical constraints of dubbing.

### 3. Discussion

Similar to literary translation, there are linguistic, cultural and communicative adaptations to be made in films. Christopher Nolan’s *Oppenheimer* (2023) is a historical drama with a serious tone, dense scientific dialogue and period-specific references. From an eco-translation perspective, the Ukrainian dubbing of *Oppenheimer* (2024) had to navigate a complex communicative environment. The film’s subject (the creation of the atomic bomb) carries profound resonance in Ukraine, a country that has experienced the spectre of nuclear threat and is now in a state of war. Although the translators would not alter the content to reflect current events, they operate within an environmental context where accuracy and gravity are paramount. The dubbing team’s first priority was linguistic adaptation – rendering technical physics terms, military ranks and historical names in correct, comprehensible Ukrainian. This involves selecting established Ukrainian equivalents for terminology. We can infer that in *Oppenheimer*’s dubbing, nothing would be seen as foreign. The translators’ goal was a domesticated fluency that lets viewers focus on the drama, not the fact that it is translated. In eco-translatology terms, the Ukrainian *Oppenheimer* finds equilibrium. It is faithful to the source content, yet fully adapted to the target language’s lexicon, cultural references and emotional register. This balance exemplifies what Zhou noted about film translation, “Success relies on the translator’s adept ‘adaptation and selection to convey historical and humanistic information effectively” (Zhou 2018: 67).

Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie* (2023) presents a very different challenge: a satirical comedy rooted in contemporary pop culture, bursting with humour, irony and musical sequences. The translational eco-environment here is one of playful language and fast-paced jokes – a context where cultural nuances loom large. The Ukrainian dubbing of *Barbie* (2023) had to be especially adaptive on the cultural and communicative dimensions to capture the film’s witty spirit. A straightforward literal translation would likely fail to amuse, so the translators engaged in creative problem-solving akin to what

Weston described as ‘creative reinterpretation’ (Weston 2022: 4). It is often needed to achieve the same audience reaction. One key strategy was the domestication of humour. The Ukrainian translators would decide, case by case, how to render it so that the target viewers either understand the reference or find an equivalent laugh. In many cases, they might retain internationally known terms, but ensure the surrounding dialogue provides comedic context that a Ukrainian audience can relate to. Translators employed techniques such as replacing a pun with a Ukrainian pun or idiom that fits the situation, adding a tiny bit of descriptive translation for a less-known reference, or using colloquial Ukrainian slang to match the film’s irreverent tone.

#### 4. Language

Working in the language dimension, the translators mainly referred to lexical and stylistic transformations within the domestication strategy, namely equivalent translation, concretization, contextual substitution, antonymic translation and expressivisation. An equivalent translation can be seen in the following example:

I told him **a cock-and-bull story**. (Nolan 2023)

Я розповів йому **байку**. (UAKino-Bay 2024, Ukrainian translation)

In the following example, we can observe selection through adaptation, and the translator managed to find the appropriate equivalent in transforming the language dimension of the original. The film *Oppenheimer* is full of lexemes, idioms and stylistic devices that denote uncertainty, mystery, unpredictability, vagueness, doubt, and hesitation, thus rendering “cock-and-bull story” as “байка” [“anecdote”] fully adapting the source text to the target one within the given context.

For domesticating adaptation, concretization is also in the translators’ repertoire:

I believe the whole **thing** is linked together and spread all over the world. (Nolan 2023)

Як на мене, це та сама **запаза**, що розповсюдилася по всьому світу. (UAKino-Bay 2024, Ukrainian translation)

We can see concretization from the translator’s side in rendering “thing” as “запаза” [“contagion”]. Annoyance and irritation expressed by the hero are successfully selected and further adapted by the translator, as the main character talks about the bomb that might destroy the whole world. The translator’s choice can also be explained by the Ukrainian perception of danger and bombing after the Chernobyl disaster and the ongoing war, and this example shows how the translator is influenced by his/her background in the ecological perspective.

Humour in *Barbie* is mostly rendered with the help of contextual substitution:

We have **toilets everywhere for both sexes**. (Gerwig 2023)

У нас **гендерно-нейтральних вбиралень аж до чортиків**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

In the movie *Barbie*, the topic of gender equality and female power runs through as a red line. Encompassing all spheres of daily life, the movie attempts to represent women as individuals who can do the same job as men and to show society's equal attitudes towards females. In the ST, we see a neutral sentence that denotes the existence of toilets for both sexes as a sign of gender equality, while the TT includes expressivation: the lexeme “everywhere” has been contextually substituted and stylistically intensified – “...аж до чортиків.” [“up to the devils”]. A noteworthy decision of the translator was to render “for both sexes” as “гендерно-нейтральних,” [“gender-neutral”], applying contextual substitution for not domesticating the original but being clear and respectful for the target audience.

Domestication can be seen as well, in the next example, where the target text sounds more colloquial:

What are you **wearing**? (Gerwig 2023)

Що ти **нап'ялив**? (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

The main aim of the film *Barbie* is to show how female emancipation has been made during the last centuries, and how a woman can give a compliment to a man or embarrass him. When Barbies wish to express their excitement, shock, or dissatisfaction, they ask Ken various questions. The translation “нап'ялив” [“dressed yourself in”] expresses disagreement with the garments worn by males and critical evaluation of their outlook and illustrates the usage of stylistic expressivation within the strategy of domestication.

When looking at the process of translation through the prism of eco-translatology, translators do not always intensify the target text; sometimes he/she finds appropriate variant equivalents and contextual substitutions:

**Ken's Mojo Dojo Casa House** (Gerwig 2023)

**Кенова мачо-хлопчача-кайфова хата.** (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

Alliteration of the source text, namely “Mojo Dojo Casa House” has been rendered as “Мачо-Хлопчача-Кайфова Хата” [“Macho-Khlopchacha-Kaifova Khata”], preserving with the same stylistic device the humorous effect of Ken's dwelling description.

Conveying language antonymically also produces a humorous effect in the TT, influencing both linguistic and cultural aspects. Ken constantly teases Barbie with questions of her employment and skills. By calling her “professional goofball,” he means that the only position a woman can occupy is being unemployed and doing nothing:

So, you are like a **professional goofball**? (Gerwig 2023)

То ти **пустоголова фіфа**? (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

Many English explanatory dictionaries (Oxford, Cambridge, Marriam-Webster) define “goofball” as a naïve, stupid or goofy person. The collocation “professional goofball” suggests someone who consistently behaves in a foolish manner. The

translator renders it synonymically as “пустоголова” [“empty-headed”], adding even more stylistic colouring to the target text.

## 5. Culture

Culture is one of the integral parts of eco-translatology, which mostly shows how the translator renders the source text within his/her cultural environment. Humour is one of the basic elements that requires culture-specific translation, especially in localizing and domesticating a movie. Looking at cultural dimensions in translation, the following translation transformations are the dominant: expressivation, addition, contextual substitution and cultural equivalents.

Mostly, translators tend to stylistically intensify the target text but also make it more lexically rude and arrogant:

Don't be an **asshole**, Nicholas! (Nolan 2023)

Не будьте **гівнюком**, Ніколасе! (UAKino-Bay 2024, Ukrainian translation)

In the source text, we can see a typical vulgarism *asshole* that is widely used in movies to express irritation about a person in American culture. In the Ukrainian dubbed translation, we observe – “гівнюком,” [“a little shit”], which sounds more black-humoured and arrogant, but it matches the irrelevant tone of the movie.

The usage of colloquial Ukrainian slang is seen in rendering the source text idioms that sound even stylistically stronger and intensified than in the source text:

The money is **pouring in** ... (Gerwig 2023)

Грошей **достобика**... (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

Using “достобика” [“a hell of a lot”] in the target text shows the usage of vulgarism instead of an equivalent or contextual substitution for ‘pouring.’ The translator is inevitably influenced by the cultural surroundings he/she is in, as in Ukrainian culture, we often tend to exaggerate even more than it is in reality.

Culturally specific context is visible in most of the female descriptions and the translation transformation that is dominant in this segment is addition:

- What is this? – Що це?

- **Cellulite**. – **Це целюліт**.

- It will spread everywhere, and you will be **upset and emotional** (Gerwig 2023).

Він розповсюдиться скрізь і ти станеш **гидкою рюмсою з комплексами**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

Ukrainian society is now only on the verge of perceiving women as they are, with cellulite, wrinkles and other signs of aging and body deformation. Rendering “upset and emotional” as “гидкою рюмсою з комплексами” [“a nasty, snivelling crybaby with insecurities”] not only shows expressivation, but also contextual substitution with the addition “рюмсою з комплексами.” In Ukrainian culture, if a woman is emotional,

she tends to cry often, that is why the colloquialism “пюмсою” [“snivelling”] has been chosen. Having cellulite in our culture is always perceived as a drawback, an inferiority complex, so the translator put emphasis on making the target text sound fully different from the source one.

While rendering idioms that are considered to be an inseparable part of expressing humour and colouring the language, the translator renders them by substituting the symbol and choosing a more culturally suitable equivalent:

**I don't give a flying squirrel** who you are. (Gerwig 2023)

**Мені по цимбалах** хто ти. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

“Цимбали” is the Ukrainian equivalent of hammered dulcimer, an idiom expressing a person's absolute indifference to the ongoing situation, while in the source text, we have an animalistic symbolism of “a flying squirrel.” The translator managed to preserve the meaning and to domesticate it within the realm of his/her cultural surroundings, changing the image.

A similar example of image substitution can be seen in the following example:

- **I bet** she doesn't even want you to go.

- Well, **you bet both those things**. (Gerwig 2023)

- **Зуб даю**, вона не хоче, щоб ти йшов.

- **Роздавай зуби скільки влізе**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

The source text expresses metaphorically the hero's conviction of not having the desire to go and we can see certainty in his words. The translator chooses a culturally specific idiom “зуб даю” [“I give a tooth”] to domesticate and localize certainty and preserve the emotional colouring of the original.

## 6. Communication

Eco-translation is vividly seen in the communicative dimension as well, as it recreates the author's intent and the text's pragmatic effect for the target audience, ensuring the translation fulfils the intended function in the new context. Addition, antonymic translation and contextual substitution are the prevailing translation strategies to reach the communicative effect of the ST. In the movie *Barbie*, the heroines often joke about Ken and that he is not of great need for them and that they can do without him:

Don't tell them but I never wanted a Ken. That's because Ken is **totally superfluous**. (Gerwig 2023)

Я ніколи не хотіла Кена. Це тому що Кен **завжди як п'яте колесо**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

Using an adverb with an adjective, *totally superfluous* gives us an understanding of something in surplus, extra, or not needed, while the target text shows us a shortened phrasal verb “як п'яте колесо” [“the fifth wheel”], which has the meaning of a third



wheel. A quite neutral lexeme in the original became stylistically intensified in the translation, which domesticates the target text and gives it a scent of a cultural flavour.

The next example of culturally intensified target text with a phrasal verb in the communicative dimension is as follows:

Better **off without him**. (Gerwig 2023)

**От і баба з воза**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

The source text has a colloquial idiom that implies leaving without the person, while the translation includes symbolism and includes a famous Ukrainian proverb “баба з воза, кобилі легше” [“the woman is off the cart, the mare feels lighter”] in a shortened version. The target text is culturally domesticated, which undeniably has an impact on the perception. The Ukrainian proverb shows the state when you get rid of somebody who has been a burden to you.

Cultural domestication is vividly observed in rendering the collocation “to go crazy”:

Everybody will **go crazy**. (Nolan 2023)

**Шифер потроху їде**, ні? (UAKino-Bay 2024, Ukrainian translation)

It is very typical for the Ukrainians to use the idiom “їде шифер” [“the slate moves”], to denote someone being crazy or mentally unstable. “Шифер” figuratively means roof and symbolically shows the person’s unstable psychological condition.

Addition in symbolism is seen in the communicative aspect of eco-translatology as translators are influenced by the communicative aspect within a translator-cantered approach:

Kitty and I were grown-ups. We’ve **walked through fire together**. (Gerwig 2023)

Ми з Кітті давно разом. Ми **пройшли вогонь і мідні труби**. (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

The following example illustrates partial symbolic equivalence in translation: the word “fire” [“вогонь”] is preserved, but the target text adds another element of the idiom – “мідні труби” [“copper pipes”], which, in the communicative context of a Ukrainian translator, signifies being tested by fame and challenges.

The antonymic translation is also quite frequently used to apply for creative compensation in the target text:

He **wasn’t always patient** with us mere mortals. (Nolan 2023)

**Не церемонився** з нами простими смертними. (UAKino-Bay 2024, Ukrainian translation)

Stylistically intensified target text contains a surplus of courtesy. A colloquialism “не церемонитися” [“not to be to be ceremonious”] is more communicatively colored than the lexeme “patient,” which again is a sign of domestication.

A complete contextual substitution for preserving the humorous effect in a communicative situation has been made while describing a Ken who became a mermaid:

Have a brewski beer. **My big guy is thirsty.** (Gerwig 2023)

Ось випий пива, **щоб твоя луска не сохла.** (UAKino-Bay 2023, Ukrainian translation)

In the source text, the phrase “Have a brewski beer. My big guy is thirsty” functions as a straightforward suggestion to have a drink, framed in an informal, friendly tone. The language is colloquial, using “brewski” to emphasize casual familiarity and camaraderie, while “my big guy” conveys affection and a sense of personal connection. The communicative goal is simple: to encourage someone to drink, with a light-hearted, relaxed undertone. In the Ukrainian translation, “Ось випий пива, щоб твоя луска не сохла,” the literal meaning is roughly “Here, have a beer so that your scale doesn’t dry out.” This choice diverges from the literal source text and introduces a darkly humorous or ironic tone. The translator adapts the dialogue to align with the visual and narrative context of the film, possibly referencing a visual cue, character trait, or situational irony that is present in the scene. The use of metaphorical language – “твоя луска не сохла” – adds expressive and cultural coloring, which is not explicit in the source.

## 7. Conclusion

Approaching translation with an ecological mindset emphasizes that language is not translated in a vacuum but within a web of interdependent contexts. Eco-translatology, as discussed, influences translators to become keen observers and active shapers of this web-balancing source fidelity with target adaptability. By examining Ukrainian translations of *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie*, we saw how even two vastly different films benefited from translators making conscious adaptive choices regarding terminology, tone, humour and cultural signals. These choices were driven by considerations of environment, culture and communication – the elements eco-translatology urges translators to respect. In supporting the development of the eco-translatological perspective, it is worth mentioning that it offers a rich theoretical foundation to analyse and compare translation strategies. Translators, like good environmental stewards, cultivate translations that can thrive in a new habitat – preserving the core message, while letting it adapt in form. This ensures that fiction and films, when translated, continue to communicate powerfully and resonate within their new cultural ecosystems.

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The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

**Ethical Standards**

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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