



An Inter-Semiotic Eco-Version Of The Qur'an Based On Michael Cronin's Eco-Translation Theory

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Received: 15-5-2023 Revised: 21-6-2023

Accepted: 8-7-2023 Published: 14-7-2023

DOI: 10.21608/jssa.2023.307668

Volume 24 Issue 5 (2023) Pp1-19.

Abstract

This research attempts to suggest an application of Michael Cronin's pioneering insights of eco-translation theory (2017) to present the Qur'anic story of man and nature in a creative and attractive form. The researcher first highlights those parts of Cronin's theory – as explained in his book *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2017) - that can be applied on retranslating the relation between man and nature in the holy Qur'an and introducing it in a creative form. She explains that a competent eco-translation according to Cronin must be resilient, legible, attractive, visible, creative, and inter-semiotic (i.e. depending on inter-semiotic tools like images and dialogue for example). She recommends applying those characteristics to provide a simplified inter-semiotic eco-version of the holy Qur'an that can be more attractive and more suitable for the challenges of the present time. Finally, the researcher introduces a sketch of an inter-semiotic eco-version of the holy Qur'an as a model of application suggested for more research and revision.

Keywords: *eco-translation, inter-semiotic version, Qur'an translation.*

When, as a result of climate change, the very survival of human beings as a species is called into question, it is inevitable that translation as a highly complex activity practised by the species for millennia will be affected. If as David Wallace-Wells claims at the beginning of *The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future*, "It [climate catastrophe] is worse, much worse than you think" (2019: 3), then it is not surprising that translation scholars have begun to think about translation in the context of these radically changing circumstances. (Cronin, 2021)

Introduction

In 2017, the influential Irish translation theorist Michael Cronin published his book *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* to explore the challenges to translation posed by human-induced environmental change. The book grabbed the attention of leading scholars of translation, eco-criticism and environmental studies worldwide as a thought-provoking book that timely offers a challenging and ultimately hopeful perspective on how translation can play a vital role in the future survival of the planet:

In today's globalized and techno-centric world, ecology has been the cynosure of all eyes and for this reason, the book is a well-timed publication from which to consider and study translation in relation to our ecological conditions. This work gives a new perspective to the study of translation in relation to the ecological conditions at present. Interestingly, this book has put more of its emphasis on intra-lingual and inter-semiotic translation rather than on practices of inter-lingual translation ... In my view, Cronin's work makes us aware of the gravity of our ecological situation and provides ways to think about translation as a form of energy with the capacity to preserve the ecological environments and sites affected due to human activities. The book thus will attract the attention of scholars in Translation Studies as well as in Environmental Sciences and the sciences related to the study of eco-system, the survival of the species and energy resources. Reading this book will enlighten readers and raise awareness of eco-translation as a concept in general and draws timely attention to the visibility and viability of translation in particular. (Panda, 2018)

On the other hand, the holy Qur'an is a heavenly book that God sent to all humanity to guide them to their wellbeing. It addresses the challenges man can face in life and organizes his relations with God, people, time, and nature. The relation between man and elements of nature is referred to in many contexts in the Qur'an. Although it is not stated as explicit statements, it is, rather, deduced from different verses that either prevent man from destroying nature or urging him to use it wisely. The Qur'anic values about the relation between man and nature are very relevant to the ecological threats of the time. Although the Qur'an is translated into many languages, the ecological story of the Qur'an is not clear in those translations. The language of the Qur'an is difficult to translate,

and when translated the explicit meanings become opaque and the implicit meanings become blurred.

Research Objective

The question of this research is how Cronin's insights about eco-translation can help make the Qur'anic story of man and nature clearer to target readers. This paper attempts to show how Cronin's ideas about eco-translation, discussed in his book *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2017), can help introduce the ecological philosophy of the Qur'an in an attractive untraditional form.

Cronin's Theory and Translating the Relation between Man and Nature in the Qur'an

According to Cronin, the ecological changes the world is witnessing nowadays need parallel changes in translation studies to cope with them. Translation studies, as one of the human and social sciences, 'cannot remain immune to the ecological shift in many humanities and social science subjects' argues Cronin (2017, p. 3). He introduces 'Eco-Translation' as 'an attempt to think through some of the assumptions we make about translation and how they may need to be radically re-thought on a planet that, from a human standpoint, is entering the most critical phase of its existence' (Cronin, 2017, p. 3). This has implication on the translation of the Qur'an. It means, according to Cronin, that the translation of the Qur'an cannot remain immune to the changes of the time. The translations of the verses that tackle the relation between man and nature in the Qur'an should be rethought and changed. This change has many aspects that Cronin explains in his book *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2017) but only those that have relevance to Qur'an translation are highlighted hereafter:

1- Process vs. Product

Cronin criticizes the world's hasty consumption of translation products without paying enough attention to the process of translation. People nowadays are always in a hurry and resort to ready-made translation products instead of spending time evaluating the process of translation. They are obsessed with the *what* not the *how*; the ends not the means.

One of the reasons for desiring the attention of others is to make work visible or have it valued. The difficulty in the contemporary moment is that the products of translation may be visible but not the process. Taking a key concept from social anthropology, the 'logic of inversion', the chapter looks at how the means needed to bring about a translation – human, social, cultural – are often sacrificed to the ends of immediacy, transparency and instantaneity. This tyranny of ends over means relates to the more general concealment of the earth's resources that have made human action possible. (p.3)

This draws attention to the problem of having many translation products of the Qur'an here and there without considering the process how they are translated. If Cronin attributes 'tyranny' of 'product' over 'process', in all translations, to reasons of 'immediacy, transparency and instantaneity', it has one more reason in Qur'an translation; that is the difficulty of the original text. The Qur'an is too difficult to translate. The complete translation products of the Qur'an are full of problems that add to the opacity of the source text in general and the verses about man and nature in particular.

2- Resilience

'Resilience' argues Cronin 'is generally understood as the capacity for individuals, cultures and societies to withstand stress or catastrophe' (p.17). It means that translation process should be flexible to survive the new challenges of time. The 'only way of safeguarding difference is not more translation but less It is the resistance of language to univocal meaning, the countless historical, political and cultural associations of words that trouble any easy traffic between languages' (p.17). The more flexible a translation process is, the more it can keep pace with the challenges of the age:

What the online collaborative debates reveal is that the more language resists translation, the more it invites translation. So we can advance the idea that the ability of language to survive and flourish over time and adapt to a multiplicity of pressures – the principle of resilience – lies in the endless unveiling of the incommensurable in language which calls for new translations, new accommodations, new ways of rendering what can only be rendered with difficulty. (p.19)

Applying this on Qur'an translation, it can be concluded that there needs to be more flexible processes of translation to communicate the Qur'an to foreign readers in a simplified way. The verses that address the relation between man

and nature, accordingly, should be reintroduced in a new form to make the ecological philosophy of the Qur'an clear for the whole world.

3- Legibility

A very relevant to the concept of 'resilience' is the concept of 'legibility'. For a translation to be flexible, it should, according to Cronin, attract people's attention by using their own language. "In globalized markets, with attention an increasingly scarce resource, one way to make people sit up and pay attention is to offer them products in their own language. 'Legibility' of supply encourages expansion of demand" (p.22). Of course all translations, even inflexible ones, use the language of the target recipients, but the 'legibility' meant here is to use their language in a simple and attractive way. It should be freed of the cultural gaps, peculiarities, and ambiguities of traditional translations. This means that the content of the Qur'an, especially the ecological content, should be presented to target readers in a simple and clear language to attract their attention.

4- Attention

In the age of information, money controls the media. The more a media product attracts attention, the more it makes money. This means, explains Cronin, that the economic emphasis is shifted nowadays from product to promotion; from content to commercials. That is to say, products of very trivial content can be promoted to attract much attention and make a lot of money, while most valuable material can be unattractive for a huge audience and make no financial profits:

We would be paid to pay attention. This is, in a sense, what has happened with Google where users can use extremely powerful search engines seemingly free of charge... For Google, the user is the product and her attention span has a lucrative exchange value. The more she pays attention, the more Google gets paid for her to pay attention. What these developments highlight is a fundamental shift in economic emphasis from production to promotion. In information-rich environments, a series of media gates exist to filter information to potential users or consumers. Not all of these media gates have the same power co-efficient. An ad in a local college newspaper will not reach the same audience as an ad on prime time television. .. In other words, as societies are more and more heavily

invested in various forms of mediation, from the rise of the audiovisual industries to the emergence of digital technologies, it is less the production of goods and services than the production of demand through the capture of attention that absorbs increasing amounts of resources. Getting people to take notice is the main income generator. (p.20)

Therefore, translations of the Qur'an need promotion to attract people's attention. In order to communicate the meanings of the Qur'an, especially the ecological ones, to target readers, translations should be promoted in a way that invites people all over the world to read them and draws their attention that the Qur'an can help them lead a better life.

5- Visibility

Quoting Citton, Cronin explains that 'visibility' measures the 'extent to which someone exists on the basis of the quantity and quality of other's perceptions of them' (Citton, 2014, as cited in Cronin 2017, p.25). In the age of mass media, a material, a translation for example, needs propaganda to become visible and be able to attract people's attention:

If we consider the earlier contention that a significant shift in economic activity has been from production to promotion, then translation products must, by definition, become part of the attentional arms race where more and more resources are devoted to capturing the attention of readers in the crowded virtual agora of 'world literature'. (p.26)

The cyberspace, argues Cronin, made millions of translation products available for all people around the world. This means that to be visible, a translation needs powerful propaganda to compete with other translations and convince the users that it deserves their attention more than the rest of works:

The digital has opened up vast possibilities for the dissemination of translated literature in cyberspace but the difficulty is contending with the attentional economy of cybertime, the making visible of a writer or a literature in translation that must compete in the electronic agora. (p. 27)

Without this propaganda, or 'promotion', translations 'will be met with puzzlement, or worse, indifference, if audiences have no idea of what is going on' (p.27).

Cronin then highlights the role of state to sponsor promotion of products that best represent its culture to the world. He refers to examples of countries that establish 'state-funded agencies' that 'seek to promote positive images of

cultural capital as part of a soft power strategy in international relations' (p.27). The British Council, for instance, 'builds links between UK people and institutions and those around the world, helping to create trust and lay foundations for prosperity and security around the world' (p.27). He also refers to "high impact" as an important role that celebrities of every country can play to promote its soft power products.

Accordingly, in order to attract the world's attention to a translation of the Qur'an, especially the eco-relevant verses, there should be efforts from the Muslim states to promote it as a soft power that best represents Islam. They should provide institutions with money to produce and promote reader-friendly translations and resort to institutions and celebrities of high impact like, Al-Azhar; the Grand Imam of al Azhar; Muslim Presidents, Kings, and diplomats,... etc. to propagandize that translation all over the world.

6- Creativity

Quoting Bergson (1959), Cronin accentuates the role of human mind in creating what was not there before:

... humans were not just consumers of various forms of energy which allowed their brains to function and their bodies to survive but they possessed a mind which had on the face of it a peculiar property, 'The mind has a force which can extract more than it contains, give back more than it gets, give more than it has' (Bergson 1959: 838). The mind itself possesses a form of energy that is preeminently productive. It creates concepts, ideas, information that were not there before. (p.34)

However, this creativity is hindered by the difficulties of language:

The creativity of mental energy faces, however, the potential road blocks of language. For Bergson, one of the dilemmas for humans was that language broke up the continuum and the fluidity of experience into crude fragments. Only intuition and the imagination working through art allow humans, in the words of the literary historian Helen Carr, to 'make contact with the ceaseless flux of being' and to renew their contact with the difficult, shifting mutability of experience. (p.34)

This shows how translators need creativity to overcome the obstacles of language. If the language of the Qur'an is too difficult to translate, creative translators then should find out alternative means of translation to deliver its meanings to the foreign readers.

7- Inter-semiotic Translation

'A core concern of ecology is that we are not alone on the planet and that we are responsible for species destruction on an unprecedented scale' (Cronin, 2017, p.53). In order to reflect this human relatedness to elements of nature, indicates Cronin, 'we must invest heavily in intersemiotic translation,....' (p.53). Referring to Michel Serres' 'Great Story' – that divides the history of the universe to four phases: Big Bang, expanding and cooling, life on earth and emergence of humanoid species – Cronin mentions that what 'all forms of being have in common [is] that they receive, process, store and emit information' (p. 70). He refers to the negative effect of "subject-verb-object" sentences in obscuring the active role of the elements of nature in life and magnifying the role of man as if he is the only agent in the universe:

Ironically, it is the very prevalence of language that can often blind us to the symbolic nature of the universe. As the British nuclear physicist David Bohm points out, 'the "subject-verb-object" pattern of many languages leads us to think of active subjects exercising their agency over passive or inert objects' (Bohm 1981: 28). The active semiotics of the organic and the material is obscured by the grammatical hubris of human agency. (p. 70)

For example, a sentence like '*The peasant farms the land.*' emphasizes only the role of man and overlooks the roles of water, air, sun, land, ... etc. in the process of farming. This is why Cronin suggests 'inter-semiotic translation' as a means of representing the interaction between man and all elements of nature better than 'intra-semiotic translation'.

What's Inter-Semiotic Translation?

The act of translating from one language to another involves a political, culturally embedded process that can impact both the originating and the receiving culture (*INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION*, n.d.). In literary translation, a text is translated into another text using purely verbal means. This process is considered "intra-semiotic" as it remains in the verbal domain within the system of signs and meaning we call language. In contrast, an intersemiotic translation carries a source text (or artefact) across sign systems and typically creates connections between different cultures and media (*INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION*, n.d.). While in literary translation the onus tends to lie principally on the translator to convey the sense of the source artefact, intersemiotic translation

involves a creative step in which the translator (artist or performer) offers its embodiment in a different medium (*INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION*, n.d.).

This process is facilitated by perceiving and experiencing non-verbal media through visual, auditory and other sensory channels. Instead of focusing on the translation of sense or meaning, the translator effectively plays the role of mediator in an experiential process that allows the recipient (viewer, listener, reader or participant) to re-create the sense (or *semios*) of the source artefact for him or herself (*INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION*, n.d.). This holistic approach recognizes that there are multiple possible versions of both source and target texts and this can help mitigate the biases and preconceptions a static, intra-semiotic translation can sometimes introduce (*INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION*, n.d.).

Cronin then introduces the term 'tradosphere' to place greater emphasis on including both human and non-human elements in translation:

In this version of ecosemiotics, the world in which humans find themselves is always and everywhere in what might be termed a tradosphere. By tradosphere we mean the sum of all translation systems on the planet, all the ways in which information circulates between living and non-living organisms and is translated into a language or a code that can be processed or understood by the receiving entity. By advancing the notion of tradosphere we want to draw attention to two facets of translation activity that demand our attention. (Cronin, 2017, p. 71)

He argues that the role of translation, throughout history, is to express the connection between the human and non-human beings in life:

...we are confronted by a narrative of human/non-human connectedness. The human is inconceivable without the non-human other. That connectedness is based, however, on a practice of translation. We claim to understand our world or to have access to it and to the beings that inhabit it and constitute it through our ability to be able to translate the information they transmit into a language. (p.71)

Representing non-human creatures in an 'ecosemiotic' version of translation is considered by Cronin an ethical responsibility:

It is precisely this translational recognition or acknowledgement of otherness that makes the tradosphere inescapably part of the realm of ethics. That is to say, if we are to take up the challenge from chapter one to develop a translation ecology for 'a transversal entity encompassing the

human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole' (Braidotti 2013: 82), then at the heart of our engagement with our genetic neighbours and the earth must be an ethical concern for the well-being and sustainability of the biosphere. Given the shift from the status of biological to geological agency implicit in the notion of the Anthropocene, the burden of ethical accountability is even greater. This accountability can only become operational, however, if we have a translation practice grounded in the different domains of ecosemiotics that make up what we consider to be an intelligible world. (p. 72)

Cronin, then, quotes Stibbe 2015 to point out the need for an ethically-grounded translation theory to help people realize the relationships between man and other creatures:

When Arran Stibbe argues that 'Ecology [...] consists of the life-sustaining relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms and the physical environment' (Stibbe 2015: 181), it is difficult to see how these relationships can be sustained without a theory of effective and ethically grounded translation which would allow these relationships to form and root themselves in human consciousness.(p.72)

This view accords with the salience of the elements of nature in the Qur'an. The earth, the heavens, the mountains, the animals are personified in the Qur'an. They speak, they think, they choose. Man is not alone in the universe according to the Qur'an. He is responsible for protecting elements of nature and is not allowed to destroy them. In many verses in the Qur'an, God urges man to contemplate the elements of nature as indications of the greatness of the Creator.

8- Toxic Uniformity

Cronin strongly warns of the dangerous effects of inflexibility on translation. He argues that so long as translators insist to ignore other creatures in translation, people will continue destroying the elements of nature:

If we do not pay more attention to how we translate the different elements of the Great Story into 'our language', it will hardly be surprising that people will remain deaf to the needs and plight of other species and the state of the physical environment. Empathy demands the solicitude of understanding. It is arguably because we currently lack such a theory that we are witnessing species destruction on an unprecedented scale and that the future of the planet itself is in doubt. (p. 72)

Finally, Cronin concludes his book stressing the need for open-mindedness in translation. He urges translators to resist what he refers to as the 'lockdown of toxic uniformity' in order to survive the emerging challenges of the age:

The constant regeneration of materials, peoples, life-forms, ideas, the endless translation, that generates multiple forms of language, textual and cultural practice is the ultimate form of resistance to the extractivist lockdown of toxic uniformity. It is also ultimately the necessary precondition to the transition to 'new ways of living and being'. (p.153)

Likewise, if translators do not pay attention to how they translate the Qur'an, if they insist to use a strange language that foreigners cannot understand, the world will remain deaf to the meanings of the Qur'an. Qur'an translators need to resist the 'toxic uniformity' of their minds to be able to re-introduce the Qur'an to the world in a new form that suits the needs of people nowadays.

Sketching and Eco-Version of the Qur'an based on Cronin's Theory

Applying Cronin's insights about eco-translation can help make the teachings of the Qur'an, especially the ecological ones clearer for target readers. A simplified eco-version can communicate the Qur'anic philosophy of the relation between God, man, and the elements of nature in an easy and attractive form. According to the above discussion, Cronin urges translators to be more flexible to produce untraditional versions of translation that suit the challenges of the present time. He suggests an inter-semiotic version of translation to creatively attract readers' attention by using easy language, semiotic resources, and high-impact propaganda.

The Relation between God, Man, and Nature in the Qur'an

The relation between God, man and nature is not explicitly stated in the Qur'an. It is rather understood from different verses in many chapters of the Book and can be summed in a simple story (*the verses quoted here are just selected examples). According to the Qur'an, God Almighty created all beings at the beginning of creation and asked them if they want to be responsible of their decisions in life. They all refused because they realized how dangerous the responsibility is. Man, on the other hand, immediately accepted the challenge so recklessly (Surah Al Ahzab: 72). This is why God gave man freedom of choice and created him as His vicegerent on earth (Surah Al-Baqara: 30). This

vicegerency is limited by time. God sent messengers to promise good people of reward and warn bad people of punishment at the end of time. During this limited time, God orders elements of nature, which refused to be free, to obey man (Surah Ibrahim: 33). God surrounds man with a biodiverse ecosystem (Surah An-Nahl: 5-8) and prevents him from causing any harm to it (Surah Al-Qasas: 77). At the end of time, God allows elements of nature to disobey man and man gets horrified when nature becomes angry and the Day of Judgment begins (Surah Al-Inshiqaq).

This story can be sketched in the following simplified version, with inter-semiotic tools (i.e. images and dramatic dialogue):

A Sketch of an Inter-semiotic English Eco-Version of the Qur'an

1- Nature refuses "freewill"; Man accepts it.

- After creating all creatures, God asked heavens, earth, and mountains if they want to have freewill. They fearfully answered "No, please God, it's an awesome responsibility!"



Vecteezy, E. I. (2023)



Vector, A. S. (2023)



Wookieepedia. (n.d.)

- Man unhesitatingly said "I want to have freewill". Man is truly unwise.



Pte, I. L., Ltd (2023)

2- The Great Creator Prevents Man From Spoiling Nature.

- God creates countless plants and animals that are both useful and beautiful
- God urges man to think of these creatures deeply to realize that God is The Greatest Creator.
- God creates figs, olives, pomegranates, trees, palm trees, dates, grapes, lentil, garlic, onion, pumpkins,etc.
- He as well creates cows, camels, bees, ants, spiders, horses, donkeys, pigs, sheep, goats, frogs, crows, monkeys, dogs, fish, whales, ... etc.
- God also creates endless creatures that man does not know.
- God orders man to use elements of nature only for good deeds and forbids him to waste them.



A330Pilot (2016)



Champion , C. (2022)



PAUL, T. (2022)



AKINYOADE, A. (2020)



Storyblocks (2023)



WallpaperAccess (2023)



Herbison, L. & George W. Frame (2023)



Phillips, J. (2022)



Olesen, J. (2013)

3- At End Time Nature Becomes Angry

- At the End Time, God allows nature to disobey man.
- Earth is shaken by a great earthquake, mountains become fragile, seas explode, and skies collapse.
- Man is terrified of nature and wonders "what's going on?!" He is afraid of Judgment.



Shutterstock (2023)



Clive, H. (1937)



Steemit. (n.d.)



Abid , R. (2023)



Gallery, G. (2010)



Lindberg, E. (2018)

End of Version.

Of course the above version is just a sketch that needs further details and efforts. It also needs promotion to invite foreign readers to get acquainted with the meanings of the Qur'an. The goal of this sketch is to just to show how Cronin's theory can be useful in introducing the meanings of the Qur'an, especially the ecological ones, in an untraditional attractive form. It is not a

literal translation. It is a version that creatively simplifies the relation between man and nature as understood from the Qur'an.

Conclusion

The research attempts to apply Cronin's eco-translation theory to present the relation between man and nature in the Quran in a simplified and attractive form. It provides first a brief account of Michael Cronin's eco-translation theory and the characteristics he gives of a competent eco-translation. Then the research shows how Cronin's thoughts can relate to the translation of the Qur'an in general and the relation between God, man, and nature in particular. It discusses the aspects of Cronin's theory that can help retranslate the Qur'an in general, and the ecologically-loaded verses in particular in a new form that is flexible, creative, attractive, and inter-semiotic (i.e. depending on inter-semiotic tools like images, dialogues,... etc.). The researcher then provides a brief story of the relation between man and nature in the Qur'an followed by a sketch of an inter-semiotic eco-version of that story based on Cronin's eco-translation theory.

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مايكل كرونين حول الترجمة الإيكولوجية

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المستخلص

يعمد هذا البحث إلى اقتراح تطبيق لرؤى مايكل كرونين الرائدة حول الترجمة الإيكولوجية (٢٠١٧) لتقديم علاقة الإنسان بالطبيعة في القرآن الكريم في شكل جديد وجذاب. يبدأ الباحث في تسليط الضوء على تلك الأجزاء في نظرية كرونين - كما شرحها في كتابه *الترجمة الإيكولوجية: الترجمة والبيئة في عصر الأنثروبوسين* (٢٠١٧) - التي يمكن تطبيقها لإعادة ترجمة علاقة الإنسان بالطبيعة في القرآن الكريم وطرحها بشكل مبتكر. ويوضح الباحث أن الترجمة الإيكولوجية الناجحة وفقاً لنظرية كرونين يجب أن تكون مرنة ، ومقروءة ، وجذابة ، ومرئية ، ومبتكرة ، وبين-سيمائية (أي تعتمد على الموارد البين سيميائية كالصور والحوار على سبيل المثال لا الحصر). وفي النهاية يوصي الباحث بتطبيق تلك الأفكار للحصول على ترجمة إيكولوجية بين سيميائية مبسطة للقرآن الكريم يمكن أن تكون أكثر جاذبية وأكثر ملاءمة لتحديات العصر. وأخيراً، يقدم الباحث تصوراً مبدئياً لترجمة إيكولوجية بين سيميائية مبسطة للقرآن الكريم كنموذج تطبيقي مقترح لمزيد من البحث والتدقيق.

الكلمات الدالة: الترجمة الإيكولوجية، ترجمة بين سيميائية مبسطة، ترجمة القرآن.