
Ethics Dilemma in the Process of Translation and Interpreting

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Abstract:

There is a general agreement on the need for an ethical code of practice providing some guiding principles to reduce uncertainties and improve professionalism. However, as there is still no clear understanding of the concept of ethics in this field, opinions about the particular appearance of such a code vary considerably. Interpreters and translators encounter a variety of ethical issues and questions in the course of their work. Both the ethical behavior and the maintaining of high ethical standards are essential in good translation, in developing the profession and in maintaining positive opinions and perceptions. An ethical responsibility of an interpreter or a translator goes beyond his duty of care. That is the requirement of the skill, care and diligence all together. National professional bodies for translating and interpreting acknowledge the need for the awareness of professional ethics which set the code of ethics, and the need for a suitable code of conduct which are accepted all over the world. To that end, knowledge of ethical standards is an integral part of their credentialing system and of the profession of translation and interpreting.

Keywords: ethics, dilemma, code, conduct.

0. Introduction

In the last decade, interest among theorists and practitioners in the issue of ethics has grown remarkably due to several reasons. Most important of which is the idea of emphasizing the differences between source and target language and culture when translating.

Both translators and interpreters have long agreed that in order to render one language system into another they are required to have a keen awareness of broad cultural as well as specific linguistic values.

Nonetheless, they have to make existential choices that are bound to have wide ranging repercussions for the text and its audience (Bermann & Wood: 2005).

In recent studies, scholars have used different ways to interpret, and they have reached various conclusions on the concept of ethical responsibility. Some have come to the assumption that the idea of translation itself could be ethically doubtful, while others receive it as a call for considering the relationship between author or text and translator as more interpersonal. Parallel to the recent studies the general recognition of the translator's responsibility has increased (Wikipedia: Translation studies).

The American Translators Association (ATA) suggests that a successful interpreter and translator must be "avid reader of a wide variety of material" (Dana Griffin: 2013).

The duty of professional translators or interpreters is to interpret and connect ideas from one culture to another. However, in order to convey an idea they have to express the appropriate intonation and inflection and to transmit the concepts and inferences of the speaker or the writer properly. Thus, there is a need for a comprehensive mastery of syntax, semantics of both the source and target languages, and an understanding of the cultural norms to increase their understanding and skill.

In view of the recent technological, social, political and professional developments that have not been explored yet in terms of ethical implications, there is a need to engage more systematically with ethical issues in the context of the profession of translation. Accountability is now a key issue in all professions and that the responsibility of the translators and interpreters has extended to include the wider community to which they belong. This means that they are increasingly held responsible for the consequences of their behaviour both on the textual and non-textual decision (Baker & Maier: 2011).

When professional translators and interpreters discuss the ethical implications of recent developments, they have pointed out the need for translator training to include a "profound understanding of professional ethics" (Bromberg & Jesionowski: 2010).

Translator and interpreter trainers have long instructed their students at the University-level to follow professional codes of ethics unquestioningly, yet they have been slow in providing them with the profound understanding of ethical codes (Corsellis: 2005, Arrojo: 2005). One would argue that ethics is not extrinsic to translation (and interpreting), an activity that in itself is essentially ethical (Goodwin: 2010, Baker & Maier: 2011).

1. Function plus Loyalty

In order to tackle the issue of the Ethics of Translation properly, one should first have an overview of the theories and approaches that govern the process of translating a text, and the strategies and norms followed by translators or interpreters in this process.

A faithful interpretation or translation conveys the message intended by the speaker or writer. A thorough rendering of the source language message considers linguistic variations, tone and the spirit of the message without omitting or altering statements or adding unsolicited explanations. A literal word-for-word translation, however, may not convey the message or make sense, particularly in the use of idioms. In that case, substitute an appropriate, equivalent cultural idiom to maintain the spirit of the message (Dana Griffin: 2013).

Hans Vermeer (1978) has formulated the first and foremost principle of the functional approach: "The purpose of the translation determines the choice of translation method and strategy" (ibid). Nord (1997) called it "functionality principle". As experiences show always that there is more than one method or strategy to translate a particular source text. Therefore, translation is a decision process which must be guided by some kind of inter-subjective criterion or strategy. This criterion should be the communicative function or functions for which the target text is needed (Nord: 2007).

If we take into consideration that the form in which the source text presents itself to the translator is a product of the many variables of the situation (time, place, medium, addressees) in which it originated, while the way this form is interpreted and understood by the translator, or any other receiver, is guided by the variables of the new situation of reception. Then

it will come in accordance with Vermeer's concept of the text as an "offer of information" (1996).

Nord (2007) paraphrased the functionality principle as 'the translation purpose justifies the translation procedures'. In a general theory, the source text could be manipulated as the source of the text (or translator) see fit. Yet translation practice takes place in specific situations set in specific cultures. Therefore, any application of the general theory, either to practice or to training, has to consider the specific cultural conditions in which a text is translated (ibid).

People have had and still have different concepts of the relationship between the original and the translated text. Readers might expect the target text to give exactly the author's opinion, to be a faithful reproduction of the formal features of the source text, or ones that are far from faithful reproductions, but are comprehensible, readable texts. Taking into account of all these different expectations this means, the translator has to anticipate any misunderstanding or communicative conflict that may occur due to different translational concepts and find a way to avoid them. This responsibility that translators have toward their partners is what Nord (1997) called 'loyalty'.

The functionality principle must be complemented by the "loyalty principle", which says that the acceptability of translation purposes is limited by the translator's responsibility to the target texts readers or listeners. Loyalty may oblige translators to reveal their translation purposes and justify their translational decisions (Nord: 2007).

Nord's approach (2007) to translation stands on two pillars: functionalism (i.e. the aim of making the target text work for target-culture receivers) and loyalty (i.e. respecting the intentions and expectations of all the partners in the communicative interaction named translation). And thus, translators or interpreters have to act in accordance with one of them during the translation of any given texts.

A translator or interpreter must be able to justify a decision (morally) to him as well as those who might question it. This process is increasingly difficult today due to the intense push for globalization, the rampant corporate cultures, the growing sense of social injustice within and across

communities, and the re-emergence of aggressive political ideologies (Baker & Maier: 2011).

2. Chesterman vs. Baker

In the last two decades, few researches have written on both the impact of recent developments, technological and non-technological, and on the way professional translators and interpreters think about their relationships to others. Yet, professional translators and interpreters have begun to show interest in ethical issues that arise from their positioning in an ever more challenging moral environment (Baker & Maier: 2011). Thus, translators and interpreters increasingly acknowledge that they have become central to a wide range of variables that characterize the world today (McKee: 2003).

Concerning translation and ethics Chesterman (2001) recognises four models: the first focuses on representation (i.e. how the target text represents the source text or author); the second on service (i.e. how translators can act ethically vis-à-vis their clients); the third on communication (i.e. how does translation operate in encounters with the Other?); the fourth on norms (i.e. do translators act as they are expected to?) (Dorothy Kenny: 2010).

According to Chesterman (2001) the different models of ethics are often incompatible with each other, and that each is necessarily partial, covering different ground to the others. He goes on and points to some gaps in the approaches he surveys, one of which relates to the world's responsibility towards translators. It might also be considered 'to belong to a general ethics of translation' (ibid: 143). He ultimately draws on virtue ethics to explore an alternative way of looking at ethics and translation (Dorothy Kenny: 2010).

Chesterman defines a virtue as 'an acquired human quality that helps a person to strive for excellence in a practice' (2011:145). He goes on to suggest that in order to make the best ethical decisions, the most important virtue that a translator can possess is the desire to make the right decision. He stated that 'the translator must want to be a good translator, must strive for excellence in the practice of translation' (ibid), and by doing this the translator defines the translation ethics.

In her more recent contribution, Baker (2011) frames a discussion of the ethical decisions that translators and interpreters face in their work. She refers to the distinction that some commentators make between ‘ethics’, or codes of conduct that constrain the behaviour of members of a given profession (such codes roughly align with Chesterman’s ethics of service), and ‘morality’, which is often construed as individual and pertaining generally to decisions made in the daily flux of life (ibid). She ultimately rejects this distinction, and rejects the idea that ethics apply only in instances where we are faced with extraordinary moral choices (Dorothy Kenny: 2010).

Baker (2011: 277) argues that ‘ethics is about the stream of life rather than just its turbulent moments’, and that ‘many default choices that do not necessarily give rise to conscious decision-making can have important ethical implications’.

Both Chesterman and Baker are primarily concerned with what translators (and interpreters) do however, rather than how translators are affected by ethical decisions taken by other parties.

The decisions made during the process of translating and interpreting can potentially have considerable impact on the other partakers. Therefore, translators and Interpreters must remain reflective. Building ethics means opening up a space for critical reflection. To reflect critically on ethical behaviour means examining one’s own values, becoming more aware of them and assessing them critically. It is ultimately a question of personal integrity, not skill in following a prescribed set of rules (Baker & Maier: 2011).

3. Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics is, to some extent, the values and principles guiding the decisions made by professional interpreters and translators during their work. Ethical interpreting and translating practice requires judgment and balanced decision-making in context.

According to the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters NAATI (2013), the Code of Ethics includes:

3.1. Professional Conduct:

Interpreters and translators should take responsibility for their work and conduct. They should disclose any conflict of interest or any matter

that may compromise their impartiality. They should observe common professional ethics of diligence and responsiveness to the needs of other participants in their work.

3.2. Confidentiality:

Interpreters and translators should maintain confidentiality and do not disclose information acquired in the course of their work.

3.3. Competence

Interpreters and translators should undertake work they are only competent to perform in the languages for which they are professionally qualified. They need to have particular levels of expertise for particular types of work.

3.4. Impartiality

Interpreters and translators should remain unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the participants in any interpreted encounter. They should not show bias towards either the author (speaker) or the intended reader (listener), nor soften, strengthen or alter the messages during their performance.

3.5. Accuracy

Interpreters and translators should use their best professional judgment in remaining faithful at all times to the meaning of texts and messages. This means optimal and complete message transfer preserving the content and intent of the source message or text without omission or distortion.

3.6. Clarity of Role Boundaries

Interpreters and translators should maintain clear boundaries between their task as facilitators of communication through message transfer and any tasks undertaken by other parties. They should not engage in other tasks such as advocacy, guidance or advice.

3.7. Maintaining Professional Relationships

Interpreters and translators are responsible for the quality of their work. They should always endeavour to secure satisfactory working conditions including physical facilities, appropriate briefing, a clear commission, and clear conduct protocols where needed. They should

ensure that they have allocated adequate time to complete their work. They should be familiar with professional and business contexts, and endeavour to have the people they work with understand their role.

3.8. Professional Development

Interpreters and translators should continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills. They should continually upgrade their language and transfer skills and their contextual and cultural understanding. They should keep up to date with the technological advances.

3.9. Professional Solidarity

Interpreters and translators should respect and support their fellow professionals, and they should uphold the reputation and trustworthiness of their profession. Their loyalty to the profession should extend beyond their individual interest.

4. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conducts provides for translators and interpreters a framework to use when exercising judgment in their job. Yet, they are not intended to be exhaustive lists of the situations and circumstances that may comprise compliance and non-compliance with the Code of Ethics.

According to the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators AUSIT (2012), the Code of Conducts includes:

4.1. Conduct Issues Specific to Translators:

1. Translators must ascertain the intended purpose of the translation and the form of delivery required.
2. Translators must obtain as much information, terminology or reference material as possible and necessary for the proper translation, and treat such material confidentially or as expressly agreed.
3. Translators must deliver a translation that completely and impartially renders the meaning and intention of the source text within the parameters and requirements of the target language and culture.
4. Translators work only from source languages and into target languages in which they are qualified.
5. Translators must only perform work which they believe is within their translation competence and relevant specialist competence and for which they have the necessary resources, transfer abilities, level of understanding and fluency.

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6. If the source text contains particular elements that need to be taken into account in carrying out the translation, translators use their best endeavours to bring this to the attention of the reader or listener. Such elements may include ambiguities, factual inaccuracies, linguistic errors, imprecise terminology, language that in the judgment of the translator is discriminatory, or wording or references that would jeopardize achieving the purpose of the text in the target language culture.

4.2. Conduct Issues Specific to Interpreters:

1. Interpreters must prepare themselves by obtaining as much information and briefing as is necessary for proper interpreting, and treat such material confidentially or as expressly agreed.
2. Interpreters must relay accurately and completely everything that is communicated.
3. Interpreters must interpret in the first person.
4. Interpreters must maintain the emotions of the speakers in their interpreting and do not soften or enhance the force of messages conveyed or language used.
5. If obvious untruths are uttered, interpreters must convey these accurately in the same manner as presented.
6. If anything is unclear, the interpreter must ask for repetition, rephrasing or explanation, informing all participants of what is happening.
7. Interpreters must familiarize themselves with the increasing use of technology for interpreting, including telephone, video and internet interpreting, and diverse recording/transmitting devices. Interpreters who engage in interpreting using these technologies prepare themselves by understanding the purposes of their use and the way in which communication is shaped by these technologies.

Conclusion

Interpreters and translators play an important role in facilitating parties who do not share a common language to communicate effectively with each other. They are not responsible for what the parties communicate, but only for complete and accurate transfer of the message. They aim to ensure that the full intent of the communication is conveyed.

The codes of ethics and conducts for translators and interpreters exist in some countries; yet some consider it as guidelines on issues related to

professional competence rather than codes. However, sometimes translators or interpreters experience ethical dilemmas related to their personal views. By considering the linguistic and cultural differences between any two languages, and the role of the translator or interpreter to bridge the cultural gaps, then the translator or interpreter task is certainly an ethical one. This dual responsibility of maintaining cultural identity and building linguistic bridges between the two cultures may well be described as an ethics of translation or the ethical work of translation.

Recently the world looks at translators and interpreters as active partakers in the geopolitical conflicts, and this raise the question of how they would act ethically independent from their own identity or judgement. This leads to the conclusion that we cannot consider a translation as a process of language transfer, but also as socially and politically directed activities.

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عبد الواحد مسلط (دراسة: اخلاقيات الترجمة)(الحوار المتمدن: العدد 2603 / 2009).

مُعضلة الاخلاقيات في عملية الترجمة التحريرية والشفوية

المستخلص:

ان الحاجة الى ايجاد مجموعة من القواعد التي توفر بعض المبادئ الاساسية والتي من شأنها توجيه عملية الترجمة لغرض التقليل من الالتباس والحيرة ورفع مستوى الاحترافية متفق عليها جمعاً. وبما انه ليس هناك فهم واضح لمفهوم الاخلاقيات في مجالنا هذا فأن الاراء حول وجود هكذا قواعد تتباين بشكل ملحوظ. يواجه المترجمون التحريريون والمترجمون الشفويون الكثير من القضايا الاخلاقية والاسئلة العالقة اثناء عملهم. يعتبر التصرف الاخلاقي بالاضافة الى المعيار الاخلاقي الرفيع من المسائل الاساسية في الترجمة الجيدة وكذلك في تطوير المهنة وايضا في المحافظة على الاراء والتوقعات الايجابية. تتعدى المسؤولية الاخلاقية لاي مترجم واجبه في مراعاة ذلك ليشمل المهارة والمراعاة والاجتهاد. اقرت الجهات الدولية المختصة بالترجمة التحريرية والشفوية الحاجة الى الإحاطة باخلاقيات المهنة والتي حددت القواعد الاخلاقية بالاضافة الى الحاجة الى القواعد السلوكية المناسبة المتعارف عليها في كل دول العالم. وعليه فأن هذه المعايير الاخلاقية هي جزء رئيس من نظامهم المعتمد ومن مهنة الترجمة.

كلمات مفتاحية : اخلاقيات - مُعضلة - قواعد - السلوك