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1 Introduction

At the outset, it is important to make a distinction between this chapter and the chapter about professional ethics. Although non-professional interpreting/translation (NPIT) is by definition the opposite of professional translation/interpreting (PIT), volunteering can be performed by both categories of translators/interpreters. For example, professionals can offer pro bono assistance or community service such as in religious settings (Antonini, Cirillo, Rossato, and Torresi 2017; Hild 2017; Hokkanen 2017). Although similar ethical issues may arise for professionals and non-professionals alike, this chapter will address only the issues pertaining to the ethics of volunteer NPIT.

Volunteering is grounded in a motivation that compels an individual toward the collectivity. Although volunteers sometimes receive remuneration (Smith 2000), normally volunteering is performed without any rewards, except, possibly, those of a non-material nature, such as recognition, experience and self-satisfaction (McDonaugh Dolmaya 2011; Olohan 2012). To volunteer is to be committed to a belief that one’s contribution to a philanthropic cause – no matter how insignificant – is worthy of one’s time and beneficial to everyone involved. For the volunteer, the time and efforts invested are compensated for by a sense of reward; and for the society or organization receiving the service, the contribution, no matter how modest, is appreciated and valued. The rewards are shared as the contributor is benefiting from the service given as much as the beneficiary is, though in different ways (Stebbins 1992; Smith 1981). Volunteer translators and interpreters can be motivated by an interest in belonging to and caring for the collectivity to whom the service is offered and possibly by the chance to gain experience and training in order to perform better. Volunteer interpreting/translation (IT) can help foster an ethical sense of citizenship, especially when the service is provided to vulnerable members of a community. In this way, volunteer IT literally becomes a matter of “social justice” (Bancroft 2015).

This drive to devote one’s time and expertise to others derives from the feeling or conviction that, as a member of the collectivity, each individual should be responsible for the well-being of the community and hence be held accountable toward others. As members of their communities, volunteer translators/interpreters feel responsible for facilitating the flow of communication in situations in which language may be a barrier to overcome for vulnerable
citizens to enjoy the right to equal access to social services (Martin and Marti 2008). Nowadays, with the increasing flux of migrations around the world, especially to Western countries, community interpreting and humanitarian IT seem to be among the research areas of interpreting and translation studies (ITS) which have substantially developed in the last few years (Hale 2007; Inghilleri 2016; Taibi and Ozolins 2016). Despite this growth there is a lack of community interpreters/translators, especially in healthcare settings (see e.g. Eklöf, Hupli, and Leino-Kilpi 2015), as well as in refugee camps and conflict zones (Moser-Mercer 2015). This lack of professionals and non-professionals with adequate preparation (Roy 2006) creates challenges and raises doubts for mediating organizations that deal with these populations (Murphy, Ndegwa, Kanani, Rojas-Jaimes, and Webster 2002). While not all volunteers are non-professionals, and not all non-professionals are volunteers, the ethical questions remain for both intersecting categories: what are the limits of their playing field? And what are the various motivations of volunteers for not being paid, regardless of whether they possess the required qualifications?

To translate/interpret voluntarily is generally understood as an action that is motivated by the ethical understanding that the effective connection and communication between members of a collectivity would not otherwise be possible due to the costs and accessibility of professional translation. Therefore, translation/interpretation would necessarily be an action that can foster justice in two ways: it compensates for the inability of some members to express themselves in the dominant linguistic and social code, and it prevents inequality and possible unfair treatment by enhancing communication and understanding. Given this backdrop, this chapter aims to shed light on the ethical dimension of non-professional or volunteer IT discussions beyond the moralizing “shoulds” and the “shouldn’ts” that typically load the discourse on ethics (Sonderling 2008).

In order to distinguish among the concepts of non-professional, amateur and volunteer, it is important to refer to more generic definitions of these terms, beyond IT, and consult D.H. Smith (1981, 2000) and Stebbins (1992), who were among the earliest scholars to tackle the topic in the fields of healthcare and grassroots organizations. According to Smith’s (1981) working definition, a volunteer is:

An individual engaging in behavior that is not bio-socially determined . . . nor economically assisted . . . nor socio-politically compelled . . . but rather that is essentially (primarily) motivated by the expectation of psychological benefits of some kind as a result of activities that have a market value greater than any remuneration received for such activities.

(22–23)

Smith limits his description of volunteer motivation to non-monetary rewards. What he underscores is that “the degree of altruism manifested by a particular volunteer or kind of volunteer is an empirical question, not a definitional matter” (23). The altruistic motivation behind a volunteer’s undertaking is context dependent and therefore difficult to measure.

As for defining the “non-professional,” it is generally characterized as the opposite of “professional” and is often associated pejoratively with being an “amateur,” “novice,” “dilettante” or “dabbler” (e.g. Smith, Stebbins, and Dover 2006). The definitions of volunteer that appear in the literature, including amateur, hobbyist and one engaging in “serious leisure” (Stebbins 1992) overlap with some features of the non-professional. More current perspectives describing volunteers and non-professionals have become increasingly less judgemental and have come to
encompass notions such as (non-)payment, self-satisfaction or interest, length and frequency of commitment, degree of the activity’s seriousness and social/political functions (see e.g. Volunteer Canada 2017; Williamson, Basarab, and Cousséé 2018).

In the specific field of IT, these criteria correspond more or less to the overview and mapping of volunteer and non-professional interpreters and translators. The defining feature of “volunteer translation” for Pym (2011) is the absence of payment:

Recommended alternative to “community translation” (q.v.), “crowdsourcing” (q.v.), “collaborative translation” (q.v.) or TC3 (q.v). The term assumes that the fundamental difference at stake is the monetary payment received (or not received) by the translator. If a professional translator is one who receives monetary reward, then the opposite term should be “volunteer” (qualifying the person, not the action). The alternative terms here seem shot through with activist ideologies, all of which are very well meant, and none of which highlight the most problematic feature concerned.

(108)

Interestingly, this definition of volunteer IT overlaps with that of non-professional IT as developed by Harris (2016). This means that whether volunteer, non-professional, natural or native translators, they all have in common the fact they are unpaid.

Pérez González and Susam-Saraeva (2012) emphasized the criteria of absence of payment and formal training. But they put forth the current fact that the development of NPIT coincides with both the development of the digital culture of “today’s post-industrial, informational society” (151–152) and “new sites of cross-cultural contact and interaction – resulting from voluntary migration flows as well as the involuntary displacement and resettlement of populations affected by armed conflict or humanitarian tragedies” (152). These indicators of our contemporary world show that technological access and mass migrations contribute to Pérez González and Susam-Saraeva’s two criteria.

While Hagemann (2016) points to the criteria of non-payment (35) and lack of institutionalization “in the sense of formal . . . training, membership in professional association and codes of ethics” (36) and low level of competence (37), Antonini et al. (2017, 8) are more nuanced when they state that non-professional translators/interpreters are not always unpaid; if they lack training, it does not mean they are not competent, and if they have no code of ethics or standards of practice in IT, it does not imply they do not “comply with the code of conduct of other professions.”

In addition to the aforementioned key terms, worth mentioning are also “natural,” (Harris 1977) “ad hoc,” (Bährig and Meyer 2004) “native translator,” (Toury 1995) “language brokers,” (Orellana 2009) “circumstantial bilinguals,” (Angelelli 2010) as well as the vaguer notion of “service” (Perold, Stroud, and Sherraden 2003) and “informal” interpreters (MacFarlane et al. 2009); all may be considered as interrelated and complementary concepts to “volunteer” and “non-professional” translators/interpreters – “non-professional” seeming to represent, for some, the preferred “umbrella term” (Pérez González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Antonini et al. 2017, 6). It is interesting to note that the latter publication does not even discuss the term of “volunteer” among the variety of terms in its introductory chapter (Antonini et al. 2017, 4–5), although the topic is treated in the chapters by Hild (2017) and Hokkanen (2017). However, the concept of “volunteer” over that of “non-professional” remains worthy of discussion in that it is the only term that includes both professionals and non-professionals.
2 Historical background

It may be relevant to recall that the cultural turn of TS has focused on the study of translation as a socially functional activity. This has probably resulted in the extant studies on volunteer and non-professional interpreters and translators as socially contributing actors (Jensen and Jakobsen 2000; O’Hagan 2011; Fernández Costales 2012; Pérez González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Antonini et al. 2017).

For a broad overview of NGOs which heavily rely on or even institutionalize non-professional and/or volunteer IT, one can use Baker’s (2006) categorization. Baker distinguishes between three types of organizations. The first is made up of individuals and groups (such as Peace Brigades International, Front Line Defenders, Gush Shalom) who participate in “translating and interpreting a range of narratives that challenge the dominant institutions of society” (Baker 2006, 462). Although the primary activity of these organizations is not IT, they draw a great deal on it. The second type of organization consists of “politicized communities” that were constituted through “the partly spontaneous and partly planned conversions of professional IT communities into political/activist groups” (such as Translators for Peace, Babels, ECOS) (463). Unlike the first type of organization, this category consists primarily of translators and interpreters who are committed to political agendas and ideologies and whose primary activity is IT (see Chapter 17 “Ethics of activist translation and interpreting” in this volume). The third type of organization may be represented by Translators Without Borders/Traducteurs Sans Frontières, which was created in 1993 in Paris and in 2017 was merged with the Irish-based Rosetta Foundation. Unlike the second type, these organizations not only recruit professional volunteer translators, but they are more specifically “used by Eurotexte as a selling point for the agency, thus arguably commodifying the very idea of establishing political communities of action within the professional world of translation” (463). This category of organization is thus not interested in non-professional volunteers, similar to its parallel predecessor Doctors Without Borders, which only recruits professional medical doctors. Baker’s categorization helps to demonstrate the distinction between sometimes overlapping not-for-profit and non-professional volunteer institutions. Only the former would recruit primarily professionals.

As far as the second category, which consists of organizations that use only volunteer non-professional IT and do not serve for-profit institutions, a notorious example has been studied in TS research, i.e. Babels by Boëri (2012). To facilitate the communication between the participants of the Social Forum, this network of volunteer translators and interpreters organized itself along the lines of the ethical principles promoted by the Forum, i.e. “participation,” “deliberation,” “process” and “horizontality” (271). These principles were designed to counter those implemented by professional IT and hence make an ethically motivated political statement that reinforces the specificity of NPIT.

To conclude this section, it may be worthwhile to point out the changing status and role of professionals vs. non-professionals, amateurs and volunteers in the last few decades. Not only have volunteers been increasingly recognized, valued and accepted as semi-professionals or even para-professionals, whether paid or unpaid (Feinstein and Cavanaugh 2017; Lough 2015), but their very objectives and types of engagements have also evolved and produced a “new breed” of volunteers in the last decades (McKee and McKee 2012). With the upsurge of perceived humanitarian disasters (Rogl 2017) and the proliferation of private digital initiatives through online user-generated practices (O’Hagan 2009) and with crowdsourcing initiatives like TED and Facebook (Jiménez-Crespo 2017), translation and interpreting on a volunteer, non-professional basis have gained a foothold in their respective fields in such a way that they have demonstrated their indispensability.
3 Core issues

3.1 Ethical economics

A core issue of volunteer non-professional ethics of IT lies in the ways the market value of the service is assessed. In Marxist parlance, the question could be raised as to whether a commodity that is by definition generally not offered for any financial compensation can have a use-value and be recognized as a parallel IT economy to be accounted for. Olohan (2012, 2014), whose empirical work led her to emphasize the cost/benefit aspects involved in IT, calls for more research on the behavioural economics of non-professional IT, especially because of the altruistic motivations that are intertwined with it. Olohan recalls Andreoni's (1990) notions of “impure altruism” and “warm glow” (the feel-good of doing good to others) and demonstrates that transactions in a non-profit environment do not always clearly show whether and to what extent if at all IT services are rendered for financial remuneration but are sometimes recorded through more indirect forms of work or investment between self-benefit and altruism (Olohan 2012, 196–197). From this perspective, ethics is then to be conceived of as balancing between the altruistic response to a community's humanitarian needs and the potential advantages that could be gained by the volunteer.

Another aspect of the study of the ethical economics of volunteer IT calls attention to the development of alternative economies that help reduce social inequalities by making available goods that would otherwise be objects of trade such as the “wiki” and “TED” models (Désilets, Gonzalez, Paquet, and Stojanovic 2006; McDonough Dolmaya 2012; Olohan 2014). These would qualify as “grants economy” as opposed to “exchange economy” (Boulding 1973) and feed the notion of “collaborative consumption,” which means roughly sharing goods and services online (Botsman and Rogers 2011). In the age of information technologies and the extension of systems and legislations that protect intellectual property rights (IPR) over digital contents, the movements of copyleft, creative commons and open source (Broussard 2007; Berry 2008) have been yielding initiatives to make available localized contents that would otherwise be inaccessible. Although apparently legitimized in developing countries to reduce the digital gap with the more industrialized actors of the IPR world economy, the production of software, for example, is estimated by the IMF (2018), to be worth, in the United States alone, a third of “pre-packaged commercial software, or $35 billion in 2015” (6). As for the size of the global translation and localization industry, the study indicates a market worth of US $46.52 billion (DePalma, Pielmeier, and Stewart 2018). While it was not within the scope of the study to determine a number for the global value of both professional translation and interpreting services, and even more so for the services of volunteer non-professionals, it could be deduced from the wider spectrum and extent of the latter's activities around the world that the estimated value – if it were to be calculated at a cheaper rate than that charged by professionals – would amount to more than one fold the market of the official industry and thus demonstrate that the use-value of NPIT may match its exchange-value when compared to professional IT (O’Brien and Schäler 2010).

The lack of ethics in the global cultural politics as promoted through the World Trade Organization (WTO) is clearly unveiled by the economic boundaries that are imposed upon translational activities (whether material or virtual) where the increasing needs for translation and interpreting – beyond matters of economic rights – are going against the grain of international copyright laws, e.g. TRIPS Agreement (Basalamah 2009).

Finally, the objections against IPR that suggest a culture of control and domination of access does not come only from developing countries, but also from more industrialized countries
(Fuchs 2008; Bakioğlu 2016). While copyright has become a part of “global network capitalism” (Fuchs 2008, 104), it has “at the same time opened the doors to new opportunities for the disaffected to cooperate and challenge domination” (Bakioğlu 2016, 40). It can be argued that non-professional volunteerism in IT can be deemed as a form of ethical resistance to economic exploitation (Smith et al. 2006) motivated by the desire of volunteer non-professional (VNP) translators/interpreters to preserve the ethical values and limits attached to their IT activities, regardless of whether they are undertaken with an ideological agenda. Such objections are also valid for translators in the case of crowdsourcing (Dodd 2011; Flanagan 2016), fansubbers (Pérez González 2007; O’Hagan 2009; Orrego-Carmona 2016) or even collaborative translation (Jiménez-Crespo 2017) from which global corporations benefit without rewarding the volunteering contributors (McDonough Dolmaya 2012; Cordingley and Manning 2017). The ethical choice of VNP translators/interpreters lies in their awareness of the potential disruption that their activities can have on the global monetary and knowledge economies. Whether they act against the legal provisions of copyright laws or only with the balanced interest of the wider public and their own, VNPIIT has to be accounted for among the many activities that utilize the most recent technologies that enable people to produce user-generated content.

3.2 The ethics of motivation

The motivation issue raises the question of what drives volunteer interpreters/translators, whether professional or non-professional (Flanagan 2018). If they are not paid or compensated in any form, what do they derive from their activity? Between altruism and selfishness (Smith 1981), pure and impure altruism (Olohan 2012), conceptual distinctions of volunteerism help to explain the degrees of motivation of translators/interpreters as well as the rewards of their investment of time and effort. For example, Fernández Costales (2012) has enumerated three main motivations that drive non-professional translators/interpreters – whether in the digital environment or elsewhere – to undertake unpaid IT. First, although described as “for fun,” the core motivation for fansubbers and translators of widely known works (e.g. Harry Potter) is to “allow people access to certain material which have not been adapted to their culture” (12). This type of activity usually provides a sense of belonging to its practitioners and audiences, and as such can be considered as forming a community of practice (Jiménez-Crespo 2017, 71, 222) between private and public good. If private benefit (self-interest, remuneration, etc.) far outweighed the public good, the activity would be deemed merely as a means to some ends that are almost exclusively personal, such as influence or power in certain fields of interest. But what surveys have shown, at least in the case of the Rosetta Foundation (a not-for-profit volunteer translation facilitator), is the co-existence of “both personal and social motivations working in tandem” (O’Brien and Schäler 2010, 9). This outcome is confirmed by Olohan’s study on TED Talks (2012), in which she found that volunteer translators and interpreters are motivated by their belief in the institution’s mission. Both of these examples are aligned with Baker’s second categorization of organizations that are politically engaged.

In terms of the moral principles or standards that guide the conduct of volunteer non-professionals and non-profit organization leaders alike (Jeavons 2004), volunteer translators and interpreters are mainly inspired by the same sets of ethical principles and rules of conduct available to professional translators and interpreters despite the looseness or absence of formal institutional accountability. This is where motivation converges with the conformity to the principles that a volunteer non-professional translator/interpreter may find in the cause, agenda or setting of the activity in which they participate.
3.3 VNP codes of ethics?

Codes of ethics for professionals can also be applied to and expected from non-professionals, especially in institutional settings (Boéri 2012; Aguilar-Solano 2015), even though non-professionals are not contractually or explicitly bound to abide by those codes (Chesterman 2001; Pym 2012; Harris 2016; Jiménez-Crespo 2017; Hokkanen 2017). However, in some contexts there is an exception to this general trend. According to Kotzé (2018), non-professional pastoral interpreters are not bound by any specific professional code of ethics; furthermore, they claim that it is mainly their spirituality – “what firstly defines the pastoral interpreter” – that dictates their sense of accountability “cause it might be the first time a person has ever heard the word of the Lord” (7). This means that although volunteering non-professional translators/interpreters are not legally bound to conform to a specific code of conduct as professionals do, they may be inspired by it or feel the need to be acquainted with some aspects of it when embracing a philanthropic mission, unless they are motivated by a superseding ideological principle as in the pastoral setting.

3.4 Ethics of/in training

When speaking of non-professionals’ lack of training as a defining feature, one may think of ad hoc IT as the most spontaneous form of the activity, and by the same token the one that does not require any prerequisites (see Chapter 25 “Ethics in child language brokering” and Chapter 28 “Linguistic First Aid” in this volume). However, if quality and training are important criteria of professional codes of ethics – in any type of context or as a necessary prerequisite – they are not the only measures to ensure ethical IT in the work of non-professional translators/interpreters. In fact, the argument can be made for the ethical necessity of some sort of training even for non-professionals; it is equally necessary that training in ethics be a key requirement in IT education to ensure quality and “empowerment” (Abdallah 2011) (See Chapter 22 “Ethics in translator and interpreter education” in this volume). Maier (2007) contends that training in the ethics of IT should deal with conflict and with the real-world challenges at the heart of IT practice. In the spirit of critical pedagogy that grounds ethics in social struggles, Washbourne (2013, 40) emphasizes that ethical rights and responsibilities “extend not only to others, but to one-self, one’s author, one’s target community or communities, and to the profession.” This extends to non-professional activities as well. These rights and responsibilities are elaborated through the notions of the “ethical competence” (Schäffner 2013), “moral imagination” (Callahan and Bok 1980), “ethical reasoning,” “moral identity,” “moral self-concept” (Washbourne 2013, 43) and “ethical efficacy” (Mitchell and Palmer 2010) that translators/interpreters should acquire in addition to “information ethics” – whether in training or through experience – and use when dealing with property rights and all types of digital systems (Washbourne 2013, 44). Although ethics-of-IT education was developed within the context of training IT students to become professionals, it could be argued that these ethical skills, if not acquired in training, may be developed by volunteers, amateurs and non-professionals in the field, especially if they are initially partnered with professional peers (Feinstein and Cavanaugh 2017). This mentoring however, remains a relatively rare exception.

3.5 Between politics and ethics

The competing forces of professional/non-professional IT are but one aspect of the politics that pit different agendas for social change against each other. Most of the studies in ITS are mainly geared toward comparing the skills, performance and quality of professional and non-professional interpreters/translators (Tirkkonen-Condit 1989; Jääskeläinen 2010; Jonasson 1998;
Jensen and Jakobsen 2000; Drugan 2011) and rarely address issues pertaining to the actual relationship between those two groups. This is especially prominent in cases in which academia acknowledges the competition as “‘good’ or at least harmless” (Antonini et al. 2017, 8). Despite the impossibility for professionals to meet the needs in all areas of IT, the increasing number of the non-professional interpreters/translator (Pérez González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Antonini et al. 2017) integrating into the field of IT may be of concern to professionals in areas where non-professional services are more widely offered (Flanagan 2016). Is it fair for volunteers to “compete” – for lack of a better term – with professionals when the services that volunteers offer are free or much cheaper than those offered by professionals? Does this imbalance trigger power relations similar to those witnessed on the intellectual-property-rights front between “legitimate” actors (copyright owners) and contesting ones (free riders, among whom sometimes are translators, like fansubbers)? And what would be the broad lines of some ethical guidelines to manage their interactions or rather the mutual impacts of their parallel activities? In order to answer these kinds of questions – beyond the strictly narrative analysis proposed by Boéri (2008) – a political sociology of the relationships between professional and non-professional translators/interpreters would have been in order. However, ITS research – despite its significant development – has barely addressed this aspect (Tyulenev 2015; Flanagan 2016). As a general observation, though, the open field of the world-wide web has led to an unprecedented growth of VNPIT, where volunteer and amateur translation (fansubs, collaborative and other types) are making a political statement of growing independence from corporative translated works, even if sometimes at the cost of quality (Fernández Costales 2013).

From the perspective of what Wolf (2012) termed the “activist turn,” politics and translation converge in other ways too, but more specifically in online collaborative practices. In fact, in the last couple of decades, there have been several movements of resistance, as well as humanitarian and human rights advocacy. For example, Jiménez-Crespo (2017, 203) described the deliberate effort of moving information across boundaries as an international political rebalancing of knowledge/power in times of mistrust in the mainstream media (Baker 2015). Boéri (2008, 2012), on the other hand – in the footsteps of Baker’s (2006) study of Translators Without Borders (2017) – has focused on the study of a volunteer-based IT network, Babels, from a narrative standpoint and investigated the tensions and paradoxes between principles of solidarity and diversity on the one hand and, on the other hand, concrete practices that lead them to use representative configurations (despite their participatory protocol) and resort to “colonial languages” (despite their anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideological positioning). Tesseur (2014) provides a final example where a group of sympathizers with Amnesty International’s advocacy for human rights, because of their bilingual skills, were studied as volunteers for translating internal “Urgent Actions” documents. Besides the belief that translation is a rather invisible task that could be performed by staff members or volunteers, the researcher has found that volunteer translation was initially neither recognized as part of the wider network of volunteers nor involved enough in Amnesty’s activities, but was nevertheless steadily increasing in status.

This pervasiveness of politics through technologies emphasizes the fact that it is not politics that is engaging in IT but the other way around, which “illustrates how translation is increasingly being appropriated by politically engaged individuals” (283) or by “ad-hocracies” defined as

(fluid networks of engaged mediators [constituting] activist translators, i.e. groups of like-minded of individuals gathering online and capitalizing on the potential of networked communication to exploit their “collective intelligence” (Lévy 1997) regardless of their professional affiliation.

(Pérez Gonzáles 2010, 284)
Pérez Gonzáles (2010) raises the following ethical question: how could the political discourse be mediated by audiovisual texts and exert such an influence on the public when translation is handled by ad hoc activist networks, and yet the validity of the very term “translator” in relation to them is fundamentally questioned because of their lack of training (284)?

Overall, volunteer, ad hoc, amateur and non-professional translators/interpreters – with all their respective nuances – in these areas of ideologically motivated activities are usually bound by their presupposed humanistic ethical principles. Those principles come above or even despite the fairness of the processes they follow, the recognition of their contributions and the quality of their respective IT.

### 3.6 Some ethical pitfalls

Although always presented as models for very altruistic and ethical social behaviours, societies that encourage volunteering could also fall into the trap of the state’s disengagement with the most vulnerable social groups, the private sector’s predation on volunteers (e.g. through crowdsourcing or ad hoc collaborative translation) and the (further) undermining of the reputation of interpreters/translators due to the lower quality of their work and insufficient training (Feinstein and Cavanaugh 2017; Perold et al. 2003; Lough 2015).

Furthermore, volunteer non-professional interpreters/translators services could become victims of their conscience if they think they are acting by “pure altruism,” i.e. selflessly with no private benefit (Graham 2002). Olohan (2012, 205) indicates, however, that volunteering is “motivated by a mix of intrinsic, extrinsic and reputational motivations.” As shown in empirical studies on various volunteering activities (Handy et al. 2000), NPIT can be both a feel-good action and an action that has real impact on the ground, with benefits for both the service providers and the intended receivers (Andreoni 1990; Olohan 2012; Smith 2015; Jiménez-Crespo 2017).

Finally, being taken for granted is another trap that threatens the value of volunteer IT activities – so much so that the increased or steady availability of volunteer services, especially to for-profit organizations, could further undermine the general status of interpreters/translators (see e.g. Antonini et al. 2017). These types of risks and concerns could raise some ethical questions which pit the interpreters/translators’ social responsibilities against the sustainability of their value, role and status within the communities served.

### 4 New debates

#### 4.1 The ethics of crowdsourcing/collaboration

Despite the insistence of Pym to define collaborative translation as voluntary (as it could well be mandated to be), and that voluntary work is necessarily not paid – although that was debunked by Garcia (2015) who found that many unpaid translations projects were not completed, which caused initiators to turn to paid crowdsourcing (see also Jiménez-Crespo 2017, 57–60) – Cordingley and Manning (2017, 16) emphasize that “crowdsourcing” and “community translation” made “by online communities for specific communities . . . are frequently remunerated and not necessarily collaborative.” This should clearly distinguish the notion of “collaborative translation” from “crowdsourcing” (as the former could be interactive and concerted, whereas the latter might be externally coordinated (O’Brien 2011) and should help emphasize the notions of legitimacy and quality as being ethical values because collaboration entails additional benefit to the final product (Cordingley and Manning 2017, 16).
18). More recently, Jiménez-Crespo (2019) has focused on NPIT and differentiated crowdsourcing from collaborative translation, where the former is solicited and controlled by a for-profit institution and the latter is organized by communities and independently produces its own translation projects. Although there is clearly more to say on the terminological distinctions between “crowdsourced” (O’Brien 2011), “online” and “volunteer” collaborative translation (Jiménez-Crespo 2017), it seems clear that all of those categories fall under the generic label of “user generated translation” (Perrino 2009). All this boils down to the kind of ethical question that is raised by McDonough Dolmaya (2011) on the matter: is opening the way to volunteering non-professionals for the benefit of a for-profit organization a fair thing for either professionals or non-professionals?

It is worth noting, despite some prevalent assumptions to the contrary, that crowdsourcing and collaborative translation could in some cases be for-profit and paid, albeit at lower rates (Garcia 2015), even if compensation is often felt as a “‘give back’ to the (ostensibly) free communities, even though [they are] for-profit ventures” (McDonough Dolmaya 2011, 102). In some cases, volunteers are recognized by giving them visibility in the acknowledgements (103).

Beyond the monopole of attention that has been traditionally drawn to professionals by researchers in the relevant field (Robinson 2003; Pym 2012), there is a growing awareness that the lack of affordability of professional services, especially in humanitarian and community settings, has increased the variety and flexibility of choices in translation providers’ profiles, abilities and dispositions to work in various conditions (McDonough Dolmaya 2012). In the age of globalization, volunteers create new means and spaces of meaning brokerage, as well as parallel economies of gifts and philanthropism (Smith et al. 2006) that are not fully quantifiable. This is even more so in the digital age (O’Brien and Schäler 2010). However, the digital environment is not devoid of risks, as there is a growing ethical concern about for-profit organizations taking advantage of free translations performed by unpaid and untrained members of the volunteer community (O’Hagan 2011). For Dodd (2011), “crowdsourcing . . . is just one more method corporations have found to push their costs onto the public while retaining profits and property rights for themselves” which would possibly lead to “apartheid economics of socialism for workers, capitalism for bosses” (n.p.).

In the same economic vein, the notion of microtasking in crowdsourced volunteer translation (Bourdaillet, Roy, Jung, and Sun 2013; Rahman et al. 2015) is raising another ethical question about the sustainability and fairness to translators that results from not being aware of the entire textual landscape where one’s work segment is situated. Much like the factory production lines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the segmentation of crowdsourced translation jobs was criticized as “step-wise procedures that mimic industrial manufacturing” (DePalma and Kelly 2011) and referred to as “translation Taylorism” (Beninatto and DePalma 2007). This is an illustration of the ethical concern about the working conditions of crowdsourced volunteer non-professional interpreters/translators that adds up to the long-haul problems of the translator’s status and invisibility.

Even if online collaborative translation may be a field in which volunteer and non-professional interpreters/translators are more prevalent than professionals, this does not necessarily lower the quality of the translation, as “fans’ knowledge can compensate for translation expertise” (Jiménez-Crespo 2013, 26). Interestingly, Pérez González (2010) goes further and speaks of the intervention not of volunteer or non-professional interpreters/translators but of “natural translators” (Harris 1977) or “non-translators in activist translation on an ‘ad hoc’ basis” (Pérez González 2010, 264), i.e. those who have no formal training nor even any experience beside being bilingual.
4.2 The ethics of volunteer cultural mediation

In a time of increasing global migrations and humanitarian crises (IOM 2017), community IT (defined by Pöchhaker [2008, 23] as “enabling communication between two interacting parties, with information, orientation, conciliation or educational tasks added as extra responsibilities”) has recently developed a great deal as a practice as well as a field (albeit an understudied one) in ITS research (Taibi and Ozolins 2016). One of the characteristics of these volunteer non-professionals cultural mediators (also named “public-service interpreters”) is the locality of most of their ad hoc interventions (United Nation Volunteers 2015). Community translation/interpreting is no exception, as it is usually situated in workplaces, healthcare facilities, social services, classrooms, courtrooms and other community locations (Valero-Garcés and Martin 2008). In fact, not only does the very notion of “community” emphasize the dimensions of belonging to a local social entity, but also the very fact that the ultimate function of this type of IT is to integrate the beneficiaries of the service into the said community. Issues regarding the ethics of community interpreters usually include the polarity between the “impartial model” and the “cultural advocate model” (Pöchhaker 2008). To what extent can cultural mediation and brokering, that are supposed to be part of the community translator/interpreter’s task, be ethically exercised by volunteer non-professionals (Taibi and Ozolins 2016, 52, 97), and what is the acceptable wiggle room to intervene? The same ethical issue goes for court, war and healthcare interpreters – professionals or VNP alike (Kaufert and Putsch 1997; Mikkelson 1998; Camayd-Freixas 2013; Inghilleri 2012, 2016). Although the first two in the list were more closely studied from the perspective of their professionalization, the healthcare and community interpreters are demographically more numerous as volunteers and non-professionals because of mediations that are required on an ad hoc basis – despite a recent development of institutionalized trainings and a growing number of professionals (Hale 2007; O’Brien and Schäler 2010; Avalos, Pennington, and Osterberg 2013).

4.3 The ethics of global civic consciousness

In the interest of gaining more insight in the context of the present discussion and situating it within a wide human scope of telos, the following and final part of this section will focus on a more fundamental level of reflection about the ethical significance of dedicating oneself and one’s time to the translational task. This will be done along the lines of Paul Ricœur’s (1996) search for a “translational ethos” – where he conceived of translation as the potential unity of the human species through the translation of all meanings and differences. For Ricœur, translation is a model whose “potential . . . extends very far, right into the heart of the ethical and spiritual life of individuals and peoples” (4). This model, Ricœur (1996) explains,

invites us to extend the spirit of translation to the relation between cultures themselves, that is, to the meaning contents conveyed by translation. Here is where there is a need for translators from culture to culture, cultural bilinguals, capable of accompanying this transfer operation into the mental universe of the other culture. . . . In meaning one can speak of an ethos of translation, whose goal would be to repeat, on a cultural and spiritual level, the gesture of linguistic hospitality.

(5)

Here, one could interpret that the task of the volunteer non-professional interpreter/translator – when considered from an ethically engaged purview – embodies a committed and inherent
impulse for bridging humans and for mediating the flow of meaning in the knowledge and political cohabitation economy. “I translate, therefore I am” could be the starting point of a philosophy of existence for pluralistic societies, whereby translation is conceived of as a representation of the human ethos of being in society. Hence, the notion of “citizen translation” (Basalamah 2005), that is the ability that some citizens develop, within the realm of their local jurisdiction, in bringing together people of different ideologies, denominations, frames of reference, political belongings and other cultural and social identities. Other than the similar expression of “citizen translation” later suggested by O’Hagan and Cadwell (2017), Federici and Cadwell (2018), Federici (2018) and Shackelton (2018), the meaning of “citizen translation” by Basalamah (2005) conveys not only an urgent response to a situation of crisis but is at the same time an individual or collective long-term initiative motivated primarily by a sense of belonging to the community and a willingness to commit to an activist agenda that could be paralleled to the “translation proviso,” as spelled out by Jürgen Habermas (2008). In this sense, volunteer IT requires decentering oneself, finding an intimate drive and mediating between one’s own frames of reference, positions and perspectives over reality and those of others, beyond and beneath language and symbols (Basalamah 2018), but also beyond anthropocentrism.

An example of this is Michael Cronin’s (2017) notion of “tradosphere” and the web of languages beyond those of human beings. In his latest book, Cronin attempts to bring attention to the post-anthropocentric awareness of being in a web of connections between the organic and the inorganic. In the midst of the age of Anthropocene and the increasing global ecological ethical awareness, the scope set by Cronin may be the horizon of responsibility that volunteer interpreters/translators would like to consider for their mediating activities (see Chapter 19 “Translation and posthumanism” in this volume). Engaging the Earthly other would entail that environmental activism is a volunteer IT activity driven by the awareness that “hyperobjects,” such as global warming, are the very motivation for knowing our planet better, and hence by the need to explore all possible means to communicate with and better understand the living and the non-living worlds. Volunteering is one form of an “earthling’s” quest for knowledge (Cronin 2017, 5).

5 Conclusion

Given the previous discussion, it might be a tautology to use the descriptor of “citizen volunteerism” to summarize the ethics of volunteer/non-professional translation, as both of these terms imply selflessness and commitment for a cause and/or a group. “Citizen translation,” on the other hand, would encompass all situations in which volunteering occurs by interpreting/translating people’s languages, discourses, frames of reference, positions or ethos in a democratic social project from the perspective of social justice (ethics) with a deep feeling of commitment and belonging to a collective heterogeneous entity.

In that sense, citizen (i.e. volunteer, ethical and activist) translators/interpreters could be more broadly studied as agents of connection (communication), transformation (production of difference) and articulation (hinging disparities). Although not sufficiently recognized in the mainstream social discourse, citizen translators/interpreters are increasingly considered as agents of change in societies that favour their action and allow them to develop alongside professionals – who may even be largely outnumbered. However, beyond and beneath the semiotic system, they are also to be considered as connectors, transformers and articulators of people, information, ideas and knowledge. Citizen translators would address not only matters that are usually measured against the reference point of professionals (e.g. quality, training, competence, etc.), but more generally matters and beings characterized by their polymorphous ethoi and by a much
wider scope of action, whether face-to-face or online, paid or unpaid, trained or untrained, individual or collaborative.

For instance, when translation is considered as a form of education with a social-justice-inspired democratic project in mind, citizen interpreters/translators – as defined earlier – are acting as educators and knowledge brokers. In that case, to interpret/translate is to operate pedagogically in order to transform different states of being into more acceptable ones for their end-receptors – in sum, to establish equal citizenship. As a final point, it is worth emphasizing that it is rather impossible to be “faithful and invisible” when engaged as intervening citizen interpreters/translators. Like activism, citizen IT may not be faithful if it is driven by social justice or political-reform agendas. Unfaithfulness is not about equating meanings but rather about a citizen initiative for bringing together positions and perspectives within a pluralistic collective entity. Beyond altruism, to interpret/translate as a citizen is to perform justice.

Related topics in this volume
Ethics of activist translation and interpreting; linguistic first aid; translating and interpreting in conflict and crisis; professional translator ethics; ethics in the translation industry.

References


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Further reading


This article shows how the notion of hacking, although generally considered an activity of piracy in the realm of software, can be motivated by ethical values and helps moving forward the reflection about freedom and horizontality in the field of translation and interpretation in activist context.


This chapter shows the emergence of a new kind of community translation (2.0) that emphasizes the agents (by the community) and the means (online) rather than the reception (for the community) of the public service. The fact that the community is solicited to engage in the tasks of mediation and communication allows social inclusion and collaboration from bottom up, and ultimately a sense of citizenship for newcomers.


This chapter fleshes out in part the ethical dilemmas that might occur in situations of disaster response where the use of translation technologies and volunteers could raise questions of risk management.