1 Introduction

A relatively recent question around ethical issues in translation and interpreting concerns how to teach ethics to future translators and interpreters. This question is perhaps as challenging as the theoretical debate on ethics itself. As Donovan (2011, 123) put it regarding interpreter training, “[e]thics is . . . far from absent from training programmes, although it is not always addressed explicitly.” This chapter focuses precisely on the pedagogical aspect of ethics within academic and professional training institutions. In other words, it focuses on those social structures which play perhaps the most significant role in shaping, conditioning and disseminating conceptions of the ethical behaviour of professional translators and interpreters. In the following sections, an attempt will be made to briefly map the role academic and professional training institutions have played over time and, more importantly, to explore the central questions of what theories or approaches to ethics future professionals should be taught, how the “ethical” is to be critically discussed in terms of topics and methods and which theoretical and methodological tools are best suited for guiding “ethical” decision-making.

2 A brief overview of ethics in education

Ethics in translation and interpreting have been addressed in and by training institutions from early on. Ethical questions and contemplations have almost always – and by the vast majority of researchers and trainers – been recognised as lying at the core of translational thought and practice, and as intrinsic to translation and interpreting activities (see Goodwin 2010). Admittedly, it is impossible to trace strict boundaries in the evolution of thought on ethical issues in translator and interpreter education; one cannot provide a precise historiography of research on ethics in translator and interpreter education. Across time, however, certain differences can be traced regarding where the focus was placed, the theoretical approaches to ethical questions and the contexts – cultural and professional – in which ethical questions may appear. In other words, the “ethical” has not always been examined in all its multifaceted aspects at the same time, and this allows us to discern a more or less meaningful set of periods in the evolution of teaching translation and interpreting ethics.
The asymmetries regarding focus, theoretical approaches and contexts under scrutiny in the examination of ethical issues is to be expected, of course. There are so many areas and types of translation and interpreting, e.g. literary translation, LSP translation, audiovisual translation, conference interpreting, community interpreting, etc. and so many political, social, technological, educational and other changes happening around us, especially since the emergence of institutionalised translator and interpreter education (i.e. after the first half of the previous century), that it is not feasible to diachronically concentrate or predict all possible aspects of translation ethics in training activities. For example, courses on literary translation have traditionally focused on questions with respect to the author, interpretative possibilities and preservation of the aesthetic value of a literary work, while the – unfortunately – large number and variety of sites of conflict today (war zones, sites of political turbulence or social upheaval, etc. see Baker 2006) have inevitably evoked different ethical issues, such as “side-taking” or doing justice, both for translators and interpreters involved in such conflict zones.

Generally speaking, the most prominent ethical questions in institutionalised education, from the middle of the twentieth century and for a very long time afterwards, have focused on the phenomenon of equivalence, the question of loyalty and how to achieve them (see Drugan and Megone 2011, 184). Back then, scholars were mostly concerned with whom translators and interpreters were supposed to be bound to – the author, the audience or the client (see also Chapter 5 “Functional translation theories and ethics” in this volume). They were also concerned with the extent to which the content of the original text could or should be altered to satisfy specific user needs (see functional theories of translation emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s) or to better reproduce nuances, aesthetic devices (e.g. irony) or terminological accuracy (cf. Mounin [1957] 1976, as well as Chesterman 1997 on the ethics of representation). Neutrality and fidelity have thus become widespread ideals for any transfer activity, especially for (written or oral) texts in which opposing views are presented or sensitive issues are touched upon. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the professional codes of conduct and codes of ethics that appeared, especially at the dawn of the new millennium, by various professional organisations around the world reflect and reproduce the focus on equivalence, loyalty and neutrality/impartiality as the most pertinent ethical injunctions for professional translators and interpreters, next to “pure” business ethics (see Abdallah 2011; McDonough-Dolmaya 2011; Lambert 2018). Examples include the codes of ethics by the American Translators’ Association (ATA 2010), one of the oldest professional associations, and the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators Inc. (AUSIT 2012), to name but a couple.

An extensive discussion of professional codes can be found in Chapter 20 “Ethics codes for interpreters and translators” in this volume. For our purposes, it is important to note that the impregnation of professional codes of ethics with the notions deemed important in training have had a “washback effect” on translator and interpreter education. In other words, the influence that institutional education exerted on the formulation of professional codes has had, in turn, an impact on the priorities of training institutions. Thus, many training institutions today give prominence to professional codes of ethics when called to provide ethical guidelines to future translators and interpreters. This is particularly evident, for example, in the cases of the European Master’s in Translation (EMT), the European Master’s in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) and the Conférence Internationale Permanente d’Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes (CIUTI, the Permanent International Conference of University Institutes for Translation and Interpreting). The specificity and importance of these institutions arise from the fact that they are (a) overarching multinational or supranational organisations, that is, they are not organisations embedded in an isolated or particular national context; (b) diverse, in the sense that they have been established or are governed by individuals and other institutions from various parts of
Europe or the whole world, bringing together different traditions, approaches and understandings of translator and interpreter education; and (c) they are not affiliated or dependent on any professional organisation, but aim to put forward and disseminate quality training practices as widely as possible. The way these institutions attempt to direct training is by favouring, explicitly or implicitly, the guidelines given in professional codes. So, for example, the competence framework of the EMT calls for “[compliance] with professional ethical codes and standards” (2017, 11), the EMCI requires teaching of professional ethics in the practice modules of master’s courses (2017) and the CIUTI implicitly refers to professional codes of ethics when propagating training aims, models and methods with a strong professional orientation (2019). This way, the aforementioned organisations become indicative of the high value placed by trainers on the translation and interpreting industry and, at the same time, of the general tendencies of translator and interpreter education at universities today. However, apart from favouring the interaction between the educational and the professional world, and beyond manifesting and disseminating general tendencies such as neutrality and fidelity in translation ethics, these organisations do not really shape translator and interpreter education. The sort of normative attempt to promote specific theoretical thinking about ethical issues and the shaping of the ethical behaviour of future translators and interpreters are still undertaken by researchers and teachers in higher education institutions worldwide.

During the late 1990s, research started being directed towards postcolonial and postmodern approaches to ethics and their implications for translation. Meanwhile, globalisation began having an immediate impact on people’s everyday lives. Therefore, the examination of non-Western discourses in literature and political thought on the one hand and the so-called sociological turn in translation studies on the other hand brought to the fore the social status and power of translations and translators, the ways translators interact with other professions and with society in general, questions of economic and technological globalisation, and questions of agency. The latter, perhaps the most inclusive of all, is to be understood as the ability to intervene or take action within a given social context. It refers to the interactive engagement of various factors and players within the social structure of a given group, for example, translators and interpreters within the legal framework regulating their professions and with other agents regulating a translation event (e.g. newspaper editors). These developments revived the (by then somewhat stagnant) interest in ethical issues and favoured the emergence of a yet more elaborate theoretical apparatus on ethics in transfer (see, for example, Arrojo 1995; Prunč 1997; Pym 1997; Spivak 1999; Kiraly 2000; Mikkelsen 2000; Koskinen 2000). See also the so-called second wave of approaches after 2000, including Baker 2006; Seeber and Zegler 2007; Tymoczko 2007; Floros 2011; Inghilleri 2012). The appearance of a special issue of The Translator by Pym (2001) was not a coincidence. The contributions in this volume are geared towards returning to questions of ethics in light of significant developments in the era of globalisation.

In addition to looking into ethics from the point of view of socio-political and economic developments, the 2010s were a period when research made a systematic attempt to examine the ways in which ethics could best be incorporated in translator and interpreter education. The discussion shifted towards teaching methods, tools and approaches to support practice-oriented preparation for future translators and interpreters. Again, a special issue of The Interpreter and Translator Trainer (Baker and Maier 2011) and Baker (2016) on rethinking the pedagogical landscape of ethics in the translation and interpreting curriculum aptly signalled the new trend. All contributions in this volume examine various factors and contexts that influence training, as well as tools for directing and improving training. An important remark is that ethical issues are discussed in the classroom still in a rather “incorporated” manner, i.e. largely within various theoretical or practical courses in translation and interpreting, not in dedicated courses on the
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ethics of transfer practices (see, for example, Donavan 2011; Drugan and Megone 2011). It is true, however, that the importance of teaching ethical issues has been highlighted within university programmes, mainly through exposing students to and discussing a vast variety of case studies from lesser-known or particularly sensitive contexts of conflict, which complement theoretical discussion (see Baker 2016).

Case studies, as methodological tools for both research and training, have gained importance in discussing ethical issues, mainly because they are grounded in the real world, are easily integrated in courses and provide opportunities to test various approaches by promoting ethical reasoning, that is, the systematic contemplation of what is involved in each situation and the consequences of various choices (see Drugan and Megone 2011). Case studies bring the profession’s everyday issues and problems to the fore, and they become not only an object of study per se but also one of the best tools to simulate real professional life within the “protected” educational environment. Importantly, case studies dethroned the notion of neutrality. Real-life situations and circumstances help prove that neutrality is not a sustainable ethical injunction, no matter how alluring it sounds in theory. If neutrality were to be respected at all instances, translators and interpreters would find themselves unable to refuse tasks, unable to promote communication in tough situations and unable to act as members and citizens of wider social or cultural formations. In the 2010s, the notion of neutrality has been largely replaced by notions of responsibility and reflexivity. The aims of translator and interpreter education are now geared toward empowering future translators and interpreters to reflect on their action (reflexivity), to choose among possible courses of action and to bear responsibility for the choice they make (responsibility and accountability). Since not all ethical problems and challenges are the same, there cannot be a prescribed course of action that would fit all possible instances. The course of action should therefore be decided ad hoc, that is, according to the specificities and peculiarities of each situation. There can only be general – and rather subtle – guiding principles (cf. Floros 2011) but no concrete and direct advice, as is often wished for by students and professionals alike. Unfortunately, the new pedagogy of transfer ethics does not seem to have found a way to inform and transform professional codes of ethics. This, of course, is yet another source of tension between academia and the professional world, an issue that will be taken up again in the next section of this chapter.

Yet another turn in the approach to ethics training seems imminent. In the past decade, research on ethics in transfer activities has turned to questions of activism and the role of volunteer translators and interpreters (cf., for example, Tymoczko 2000; Boeri 2008; De Manuel Jerez 2010; Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; see also Chapter 16 “Ethics of volunteering in translation and interpreting” in this volume). The active role assumed by professional and non-professional translators and interpreters poses new challenges to the way we understand these practices, their consequences and the much wider role translators and interpreters play within society and across societies. One of the main challenges concerns the very notion of responsibility referred to earlier, which is currently being expanded to social responsibility. As explicitly stated by Drugan and Tipton (2017) in their introduction to a special volume of The Translator, responsibility can never be ideologically neutral and its invocation always confers an obligation to determine whose responsibility, to whom and for what. “Responsibility” is therefore understood here as action-oriented and dynamic, encompassing value judgements and decisions that may lead as much to resistance as to acceptance and commitment to sustain a form of social consensus.

(122)
3 Core issues and topics

Perhaps the most important issue with regard to training in ethical questions concerns the interplay between academia and the translation and interpreting industry. The mutual fertilisation described earlier – in that research informs professional codes of ethics and they, in turn, are reflected in the principles adopted by training institutions – actually hides a multitude of tensions. Very often, professional organisations expect academic institutions, and research in general, to provide detailed guidance as to how to proceed with difficult ethical dilemmas of any sort, even for matters that do not apply particularly to translation (e.g. remuneration, confidentiality, etc.). Academic institutions, on the contrary, do not always consider themselves suitable or even obligated to provide such guidance. Many academic institutions around the world see their role as developing a purely theoretical discussion of ethics and ethical issues, or keeping a balance between theory and practice. Practitioners in the real world, just like the majority of student translators and interpreters, often feel that theory does not help solve their problems and consider theoretical courses and the theoretical examination of ethical problems redundant, to say the least.

The professional world often laments that academics live in an ivory tower (see, for example, Schnell and Rodríguez 2017) and that academic training fails to fulfil its preparatory role. The counterargument from academia has long been that the primary function of academic institutions is to prepare critically thinking individuals, not to provide ready-made solutions to be used blindly for the practical problems they will encounter in their professional lives. While academic institutions cannot focus exclusively on preparing students for practical problems, the professional world has offered a multitude of unexpected and sometimes unimaginable examples and case studies of ethical dilemmas, which can inform – and indeed have informed – academic training and theory building. In addition, not all training institutions touch upon ethical issues in their curricula, so they do not shape ethical behaviour at all; as a result, students find themselves sometimes unprepared for the real world. This situation has changed lately, though perhaps not at a pace that would satisfy the professional world. Judging by the expanding bibliography on translation ethics and training as well as by the professionally and market-oriented training principles followed by the CIUTI (2019), it seems that many courses nowadays make explicit reference, discuss or disseminate codes of ethics from local and international professional bodies. Today, there are many voices calling for the effective integration of examples from the real world in courses, in an attempt not only to ease the tension but also to provide education that is as comprehensive as possible (see contributions in Baker and Maier 2011; Baker 2016).

This brings us to the question of what future professionals should be taught in terms of transfer ethics. Irrespective of the tensions with the professional world, academic institutions are inevitably concerned with the place of theoretical as opposed to practical courses in educational settings. Taking for granted that theory informs and grounds methodology, trainees should start with where ethics is rooted and how ethics is to be understood in transfer practices. Also
pertinent are text-typological questions, questions of socio-political and cultural context, as well as a rudimentary – nevertheless quite important for shaping ethical behaviour – classification of ethical issues. These aspects are discussed in more detail next, starting with the last one.

A first distinction that trainees should learn to make is between two types of ethical issues: those arising before accepting an assignment and those arising after accepting an assignment. The differentiating criteria between these two types revolve around effect and dependence; the former group of issues is more unilateral, mainly depending on and affecting the translating agent (i.e. the translator/interpreter), the latter is more bi- or multilateral, depending on and affecting a series of agents and sides, such as translator/interpreter, audience, client, organisation, wider society, the text itself, etc. The first type of ethical issue includes dilemmas arising among others from personal conflict, ideologically driven refusal or reluctance to accept an assignment, legality and legitimisation issues. For example, personal or ideological conflict can arise when the translator/interpreter is opposed to the aims of the text or the client, such as when they are called in to translate, say, an anti-LGBTQ+ text when they themselves belong to this community. The same happens when they are called in to translate/interpret for a client who is, say, openly denying the Holocaust, when they themselves are convinced of it (see e.g. Salama-Carr 2007; Goodwin 2010; House 2018, 160–167). Equal problems may arise when a translator/interpreter – especially a freelancer – does not deem their remuneration sufficient or when the text is about an illegal product or idea (e.g. a banned medicine or hate speech). While these dilemmas may seem easy to resolve by simply refusing the assignment, they are tricky in the sense that a refusal might cost translating agents their job. But, the difficulty of the decision notwithstanding, these are circumstances found in any profession, activity or aspect of personal life, and it is up to the person to weigh how much they wish to wield their personal ethics and what leeway they wish to give themselves.

This type of ethical issue could be considered non-translational, although McDonough-Dolmaya (2011, 32), for example, holds that the choice to transfer immoral or illegal texts applies particularly to translation or the language profession. But to the extent that the translators/interpreters can – for whatever reason – maintain authority over their translations, the choice remains theirs and needs to be made before officially accepting the assignment. For this reason alone, such choice can be considered unrelated to the translation process per se. A quite important insight in this regard comes from Inghilleri (2008, 222), who talks about cases of “illusory freedom,” that is, cases where it only looks as if interpreters are free to choose to accept an assignment or not, when they actually are compelled to, as happens in war interrogations. This is why the first type of issue remains important as a set of ethical issues in translation, despite not being entirely related to the process of the mediating activity.

The second type of ethical issue includes those that apply particularly to translation and interpreting, encountered after choosing to accept an assignment. These may be further differentiated into questions concerning language and culture (including issues such as the degree of adaptation, accuracy, additive techniques, etc.) and questions concerning ideology (especially conflict, politically sensitive discourse and the like). For these issues, translators and interpreters need to consider a wide range of agents, from a single editor to society as a whole. They need to keep delicate balances, linguistic, cultural and ideological; make concrete translation choices for originally ambiguous instances; and decide which side to do justice to and for what reasons, even when this happens at the expense of their personal views (see also Chapter 13 “Literary translator ethics” and Chapter 30 “Ethics of collaboration and control in literary translation” in this volume).

All this challenges the widely propagated notion of neutrality, which is found especially in official codes of ethics, and promotes responsibility and accountability in translation.
decisions, a set of notions that has lately been put forward by many voices, as was previously shown regarding the dominant paradigms in the 2000s and 2010s. The ideal promoted by research on ethical issues in translation and interpreting today is that of reflexive translators and interpreters, who can effectively reason with the aim of not only working out a delicate issue in the text but also contemplating possible consequences of their actions and serving the interests of wider society. If future translators and interpreters are to assume the manifold and complex role described and propagated by research on transfer ethics, they need to be aware that ethics is rooted in values, norms and narratives that are highly subjective and depend on the cultural context in which a person lives and functions (cf. Baker 2006; Floros 2011). These values, norms and narratives subconsciously shape our ideology and stance towards others and ourselves. Therefore, students need to be made aware of the fact that neutrality is unattainable, first and foremost because every individual carries ethical “baggage,” that is, a set of beliefs about what is right or wrong, which is then put to the test by interacting with others and otherness. This is why reflection and reasoning are indispensable for transfer activities; when mediating in any context, one needs to question not only the Other but also the Self.

This might lead the whole discussion to a dead end. One could assume that if the only thing students should expect from their training is the cultivation of the ability to think critically and responsibly, without any conclusion as to how to handle a particular situation, the responsibility for the shaping of ethical behaviour is shifted from the trainers to the students. Future language professionals would then feel stranded or might easily resort to a do-as-you-feel logic. Although a training programme cannot provide ready-made solutions for all possible situations, it can at least promote certain guiding principles, which can inform the course of action without implying a predefined solution or the solution favoured by the trainer. The relevant literature on translation ethics provides an abundance of approaches, which can be taken as guiding principles or ethical injunctions for translating. But then again, it is the role of training institutions to highlight further factors that inform the choice between a multitude of approaches.

One such factor is what was previously referred to as the text-typological question. Practically, this means that different types of texts present different ethical challenges and require different ethical considerations. For example, highly technical texts of strong terminological density might be thought to present much less “ethical” difficulty than, say, a political speech or an advertisement. Similarly, interpreting a technical speech on agricultural policy seems less ethically challenging than community interpreting in asylum hearings or police interrogations. To approach this question more systematically, the notion of genre is very helpful. Genre is a socio-cognitive construct that refers to a communicative situation; in other words, it is the abstract representation of a certain communicative instance which codifies in itself social and cultural norms and values, and the form it takes is easily recognisable by the members who belong to the same social or cultural group (cf. Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Tsiplakou and Floros 2012). For example, people belonging to the same cultural group immediately recognise an obituary, an official letter, a report, a political message, a court hearing, a joke, a poem, etc. by its topic, the way it is written (or spoken), the social function it fulfils and the interlocutors involved. The norms and values that different genres codify require ethical consideration, especially when they are translated, since it cannot be taken for granted that the same genres exist in other cultures or that they are conditioned by the same norms and values. Therefore, even if the language and information contained in a highly technical text do not – at first sight – appear to pose any ethical challenges at all, the text might itself do so with its topic and intended use, which brings us to the aforementioned first type of ethical issue, those encountered before accepting an assignment. Similarly, even when a translator/interpreter accepts an assignment, a whole range of (sometimes well-hidden) ethical problems may arise, for example, in a sensitive news article on a political
situation that may use toponyms or denominations that are not officially accepted. It is true, however, that certain genres such as news reports, political speeches, social media texts, etc. are much more prone to being ethically challenging.

The fact that ethical challenges depend on genre has led to the idea of ethical relativity, which needs to be tackled in training, especially because the notions of genre and ethical relativity seem helpful in keeping the very sensitive balance of choosing between ethics rather than discussing decisions in terms of ethical vs. unethical (see also Harpham 1995; Diriker 2004). Ethical relativity is defined as “the fluctuation of ethical thresholds impinging on translation through inherently subjective values and narratives that govern translation behavior by creating equally subjective norms” (Floros 2011, 71). In other words, ethical relativity implies that “it is always the type and power of norms which will determine how tolerant each genre may be towards ideological manipulation” (Floros 2012, 937). Training needs to make clear that the stances adopted by translators and interpreters in confronting any ethical dilemma are always rooted in a certain ideological perception of the world and thus always represent an ethical choice that may lead to multiple repercussions. Seen from this perspective, these choices cannot be unethical in the sense of a total absence of ethics; the way translators and interpreters choose to handle a situation is actually by favouring one ethical stance over another, and there is essentially no unethicality as such in their judgement, even when they strive for neutrality. Coming back to the questions of genre and ethical relativity in this respect, student mediators need to be made aware that their own ideological perceptions may ultimately vary according to text type or genre and that dealing with ethical dilemmas cannot be uniform and absolutely consistent across text types and communicative situations. In fact, ethical judgement does not need to be consistent across communicative situations, since the agents that might be involved in each of them may be different to such a degree that different courses of action are needed each time (see previous examples).

Finally, the tools needed to operationalise abstract terms and discussions (i.e. to turn them into concepts applicable in practice) include the use of authentic texts and case studies of real-life situations (see, e.g. Drugan and Megone 2011), as well as the application of collaborative learning, where the teacher acts as a moderator rather than an authority, regarding the negotiation required on the part of the student. There seems to be widespread consensus in research nowadays (see Washbourne 2013; House 2018) that the best pedagogical approach for ethics training is to cultivate reasoning skills and enable students to think critically about the nature of the ethical problem and the possible consequences of a variety of possible courses of action before they decide how to proceed. Any translation activity is above all an activity of keeping communicative channels open, an activity of staying in dialogue with otherness. The outcome of such dialogue will always rest with the interlocutors involved and the use(s) they make of what is said, but dialogue must be maintained and can only be achieved in a spirit of negotiation.

The best way for teachers to foster that spirit is to avoid offering predefined solutions or actively promoting their take on an issue, but rather to help students design their own course of action in a collaborative classroom environment (see Kiraly 2000). This is mainly done by presenting them with real-life situations not only as they confront them by chance through discussion of isolated text examples but also with a deliberate choice of case studies, which should be presented systematically, that is, with a specific issue in mind as well as the whole constellation of agents and factors involved. The choice of case studies habitually comes from the immediate socio-cultural context in which students live, usually addressing conflict situations relevant to the area they will work in. Such situations can include, for example, historical or political tensions, tensions among social groups or political developments that have an immediate impact on the way a specific society organises itself and places itself within the international political arena. In this way, students can better relate to the issue at hand and, more generally, to the need to discuss...
ethics in the translation and interpreting classroom. Another important factor that influences the choice of case studies is the degree to which the translation or interpreting market is established in a certain area. In countries where such markets are less sufficiently regulated through legislation, the range of possible ethical problems is wider, since there emerge additional professional issues, such as who is allowed to work or act as a translator or interpreter.

The flip side – concentrating too much on “local” ethical issues – is that training runs the risk of not adequately preparing future translators and interpreters for the international market or other contexts in this era of professional globalisation and markets that might be differently structured from what students are used to. This is something that training institutions are increasingly taking into consideration, particularly through the circulation, dissemination and discussion of international research, especially research conducted in peripheral contexts and contexts of conflict, which have international resonance and significance. The existence and activities of international associations that promote quality training across institutions (such as the EMT, EMCI and CIUTI) are therefore of great importance not only for promoting research from both central and peripheral contexts but also for promoting and diffusing the outcome of such research among professional institutions both locally and internationally, with the ultimate aim of enabling novice professionals in particular to reflect on the role and meaning of their profession at all levels, from the personal to the societal, as Tryuk (2015, 12) stresses regarding interpreters.

4 Emerging issues

The very recent thought on translators and interpreters assuming social responsibility, translating dissent, engaging with issues of translation and migration, etc. forms an important new theoretical apparatus. What remains to be seen is how this important new thought will be concretely implemented in training, or in what ways it might inform the revision of official professional codes of ethics. Another very important and promising ethical issue emerging in translator and interpreter education is the examination of inherent legal issues (e.g. human rights, national and international legislation, etc.), how to grapple with vast contemporary and future technological possibilities and challenges (e.g. data and protection, safety of transmittance, etc.) and ultimately, how to produce a fruitful inter- and cross-disciplinary synergy between academia, the authorities and the profession.

While the regulation of human rights issues and national or international legislation might seem outside the realm of translation studies, translator and interpreter training institutions, be they universities or associations, can play a key role in shaping the guidelines that will affect good conduct in professional and societal life. By educating reflexive, responsible and critical professionals who are aware of their ability and leeway to condition a wide audience’s perception of a multitude of social and political issues, institutions can and should be among the first agents consulted by policymakers in national and international human rights protection and promotion, not least because new key texts in these areas very often enter a local context through translation. The specific ethical challenges that arise in this respect have to do with the degree to which the ethical perceptions of translators and interpreters align with or contradict the ethical perceptions of policymakers. There is also the issue of volunteer and activist translators and interpreters, who many times have a head start in promoting, protecting, supporting or even raising awareness of the human and civil rights of minorities or disadvantaged social groups. It is precisely this kind of activist work, for example, that has come to the forefront in the recent migration crisis across the Mediterranean, sometimes even leading to translators and interpreters being accused of complicity in illegal migration.
Therefore, questions arise as to who should be allowed to translate or interpret not only in extraordinary situations, but also in other, less precarious contexts (e.g. audiovisual translation). This is an issue that generally has to do with the regulation of the profession and the qualifications required to become a translator or interpreter – a still pertinent issue in many translation markets across the world. Nevertheless, activism and volunteerism should be seen in an ethical framework that goes beyond purely legal implications. Activist and volunteer translators and interpreters usually respond to cases of emergency (e.g. migration crises) or of – more or less – lack of commercial interest (e.g. fansubbing) and certainly not with the aim of hijacking the relevant professions. Intriguing questions also arise as to how institutional training might adapt to ad hoc needs for translation and interpreting services by people who cannot afford (for whatever reasons) fully fledged higher-education training in translation or interpreting, and how legislation might or might not respond to such possibilities.

A similar challenge is posed by technological advances, which go beyond computer-assisted tools that facilitate the translation or interpreting process. These advances have to do with all possible issues arising from the management of very large amounts of data (so-called big data) that are too complex for traditional data-processing software. The specific challenges for training future translators and interpreters not only arise from the volume of the data sets and the technological capacity required to deal with them, mainly through machine translation (see, for example, Kenny 2011; Folaron 2012), but also from the fact that they may contain sensitive information and mainly concern the domain of cybersecurity. Gaining access to, transmitting or controlling such information is a very delicate issue with serious legal repercussions. Any attempt to regulate these new issues will inevitably extend to all agents involved in big data, that is, also to translators. This, in turn, will pose new challenges to translator and interpreter education – regarding both the management of state-of-the-art technological tools and the ethical issues involved (see also Chapter 18 “Translation technology and ethics” in this volume).

Perhaps the most imminent ethical issue in translator and interpreter education, however, is about all the instances in which translation shares space with other disciplines (see, for example, the contributions in Gambier and van Doorslaer 2016). The various professions that involve translation and interpreting, both as process and product, such as language teaching and testing, the larger media industry, the advertising industry, adaptation studies or global news production and circulation, indicate that translation studies is expanding into a cross-discipline. This fact is reflected in newly coined terms that attempt to describe the synergy and cohabitation of translation and other disciplines, such as transcreation (translation in marketing and advertising; see, for example, Pedersen 2014), news translation, and transediting (translation and news editing; see, for example, Bielsa and Bassnett 2008; Floros 2012). The ethical challenges when translation meets other disciplines and professions are particularly intriguing, since the ethical perceptions that govern translation and the ethical perceptions that govern other professions are not always aligned. In relation to journalism and translation, for example, Schäffner (2012, 877) maintains that journalists pursue their own communicative aims, while translators do not. Similar discrepancies can be assumed in other cases where translation and other professions cohabit the same space. In such hybrid cases, the important aspect for translator and interpreter education is to examine how the two activities might converge in terms of the ethical imperatives governing their cohabitation, despite divergent communicative aims. The challenges to be tackled, and ultimately the aim of training, revolve around highlighting not only the possible differences between the disciplines involved but also the possibilities for cross-fertilisation. In order to do so, translator and interpreter education will greatly benefit from systematically and critically delving into other disciplines. Critical discussion of practices and prevailing concepts in other disciplines will encourage close attention to the ethical subtleties of professional hybridity.
Last but not least, ethical training can also be enhanced by looking at how the very concept of translation and interpretation has been shaped or changed across traditions and contexts, both in theory and practice. In other words, translation history, traditionally taught in training institutions, becomes increasingly significant for ethical training, since the comparison of canonical and less canonical understandings of the discipline and the professional practice may prove beneficial in shaping ethical considerations and guiding principles, as well as, ultimately, the “ethical leeway” practitioners have at their disposal. There is a resurgent interest in historical research on translation and interpreting in various contexts, the latest additions being the volumes *A World Atlas of Translation* by Gambier and Stecconi (2019) and *Translating in Town: A History of Local Translation Policies During the European 19th Century* by D’hulst and Koskinen (2020).

5 Conclusion

The conclusion of such discussion brings us back to the initial question: should ethical issues be discussed in separate courses or in an “incorporated” manner? On one hand, the omnipresence of ethical issues in transfer practices prompts us to consider discussing the “ethical” whenever it comes up, i.e. in all possible instances. On the other hand, the complexity of ethical issues suggests a need for dedicated courses, where due attention can be given. Rather than being caught up in yet another binary opposition, a balanced approach would be more meaningful for integrating treatment of ethical issues in the curriculum. While the spectrum and variety of ethical problems call for treatment across courses, the theoretical foundations deemed crucial for recognising problems and engaging critically with them must be offered in specifically designed, separate courses. This, however, is an issue in its own right, one that requires careful consideration of general curriculum design (see Chapter 23 “Ethics of translator and interpreter education” in this volume).

Related topics in this volume

Ethics codes for interpreters and translators; functional translation theories and ethics; translator ethics; professional translator ethics; ethics of translator and interpreter education; translating and interpreting in conflict and crisis.

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Goodwin, Phil. 2010. “Ethical Problems in Translation: Why We Might Need Steiner After All.” *The Translator* 16, no. 1: 19–42.


Further reading


Arrojo is among the earliest scholars to question universal values from the perspective of a postmodern critique and to call for educating individuals who are conscious of both their history and present social context to deconstruct power agents in their own context.


This book by Mona Baker introduces narrative theory to Translation Studies as a powerful tool not only for understanding and analysing conflict (in its extended sense) but also for positioning oneself within conflict situations that require mediation, as is often encountered in translation and interpreting.


This special issue of ITT, edited by Mona Baker and Carol Meier, focuses on critical approaches to introduce ethical discussions and more specifically the issues of the ethical responsibility and accountability on the part of the (future) translator/interpreter in university teaching programmes. The introduction by the editors as well as the individual contributions argue for a more systematic engagement with ethical issues in training by proposing not only theoretical approaches but also various activity types.


Kiraly capitalises on the traditional constructivist approach to learning and enriches it with a social dimension to respond to the specific needs of the translation classroom, proposing a teaching method that other translation teachers can adopt. The social constructivist approach maintains that knowledge is constructed both by social/interpersonal activity and through cognitive thinking processes, which appears to be particularly important for “ethical” decision-making as well.


This book provides an extensive discussion of the “ethical” in Translation Studies. In the context of such discussion, it highlights the relevance of the postmodern approach as a tool to combine different theories, with the ultimate aim of fostering continued self-reflexivity.