1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 22 “Ethics in translator and interpreter education” in this volume, in recent years university-level translator and interpreter (T&I) education has gradually incorporated professional ethics into the curriculum. If we shift the focus from the question of how ethics is taught to the question of how ethics are conceived in education, we can observe that the ethical discussion is mainly focused on the moral duties and civil rights of teachers and students. A thorough reflection on the ethics of T&I education should, however, turn its attention towards the ways in which the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students is conceptualized and manifested. Approaching “ethics” in this context means also thinking about the role that T&I education and T&I educational institutions play in a given society.

In this chapter, we will examine the ways in which ethics can be understood at the level of the T&I educational institutions and at the level of the educational practices taking place within these institutions. Furthermore, we will focus on two different and conflicting aspects of educating translators and interpreters – socialization and self-formation – and will explore the tensions and ethical challenges that these dimensions pose. Moreover, we will point out that education triggers responsibilities from the side of educators, students, and educational institutions. At the end of the chapter, we will outline some emerging areas which are strongly related to the ethics of T&I education, namely the relation between professionalization, T&I education, and ethics, as well as the ethical challenges of designing a curriculum for translators and interpreters.

2 Ethics of translator and interpreter education: a historical trajectory

2.1 Ethics and T&I educational institutions

Institutions for T&I education grapple with ethical issues regarding the motivations behind their establishment. The purpose and the legitimation of T&I education is subject to historical, cultural, and social conditions, which also shape the manner in which “education,” “translation,” and their relation to “ethics” are perceived. Educational institutions explicitly play a political role in society and instil certain ethical values and attitudes in the classroom. From this viewpoint,
education can be considered a place where political demands and agendas are implemented, and where different forces and interests impose themselves on the teaching process (Derrida 2002b). Hence, thinking about ethics in this context must take into account the power relations that structure the agents and their possible field of educational action.

The case of the Seminar for Oriental Languages at Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin (today Humboldt University of Berlin) is a good example to illustrate how educational institutions can become sites of struggle. The Seminar for Oriental Languages was founded in 1887 to train translators and interpreters who would serve in the German colonies. As such, they were prepared not only to assume a role as mediators between languages and cultures, but also to act politically in defending German colonial interests. As a consequence, the teaching models, the working languages, as well as the attitude of the teaching staff reflected colonialist politics. The Seminar for Oriental Languages was established on the basis of certain educational values and tenets that reflected the national policies and ideologies of that time and society. Moreover, it contributed to perpetuating existing power structures. In this sense, T&I students, trainers, and tutors were challenged by ethical issues associated with the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination (Pacheco Aguilar 2019). Other examples of the entanglement between national politics and T&I educational programs can be observed in institutions like the Imperial Royal Academy for Oriental Languages founded in Vienna in 1754 (Wolf 2012, 170–188) or the École des Enfants de Langues established in 1669 in Constantinople by the French Prime Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (Balli 1997; Cáceres-Würsig 2012).

With the beginning of the degree programmes for translating and interpreting at the university level after the Second World War, T&I education became tightly linked to general university policies. This brought new ethical questions into T&I education. In Germany, for instance, a major objective of the universities in both West and East was to “civilize” the society after Nazism. Therefore, T&I institutions implemented programmes which not only included the professionalization of the novice translators and interpreters, but also the induction of moral and political attitudes in keeping with the social and political imperatives of each society (Schäffner 2017).

As these historical examples illustrate, the ethics of education, in the sense of the behaviour, attitudes, and understandings that are considered correct, are generally governed by political and ideological interests. Present-day T&I educational institutions are also linked to certain educational policies and to normative ideas regarding translation and its teaching. With the implementation of the Bologna Process in many European countries, for instance, education has been progressively conceptualized as an instrument to enhance “competitiveness” and “employability” (EMT 2009). This prioritization of economic aspects influences not only teaching and learning practices, but also the way we think about the people involved in these processes as well as their relationships to each other. Moral and ethical values are hereby framed by economic, political, and social power structures that also have an impact on our understanding of an “ethical T&I education.”

2.2 Ethics and T&I educational practices

If we take a closer look at the educational practices, we can observe parallels between how actors involved in T&I education think about translation and interpreting and how they conceptualize teaching. Both translation and education share a legacy of the logocentric assumption that meaning can be transferred from one text to another and from the teacher to the students. From this perspective, teaching translation and interpreting is generally reduced to the “transmission” of knowledge regarding adequate understanding of texts and adequate equivalences
between languages. The T&I classroom has hereby been oriented around a teacher seen as a repository of translation knowledge who can transfer this knowledge to the students, as Kiraly (1997) points out:

From this traditional perspective, the instructor is a repository of translation-relevant knowledge. Students demonstrate their lack of knowledge of formal and functional equivalents when they read off their faulty translations. The instructor then proceeds to fill in those knowledge gaps with the correct information.

What we find here is a scene of repetition: students repeat the teacher’s ideal translation which at the same time repeats the meaning of the source text. When translation is seen as the repetition of an original, T&I education becomes a place where students learn to iterate certain reproducing techniques and norms. Students, teacher, and translation are considered as instruments, used to transfer an ideal meaning. At stake is a representational conception of translation as well as of the teaching performance that should preserve the meaning of an original without any loss or derivation. This understanding leads to a T&I classroom in which students acquire “accurate” conceptual and practical knowledge by “training,” that is, by repeating and exercising (Davies and Kiraly 2006). Within this framework, T&I students do not have to learn to make choices freely, and consequently to make moral and value judgements regarding the task they have undertaken, but rather to follow the rules and to learn equivalence pairs. Educating is associated with an operation performed on passive objects which reproduce and emulate the original text. Moreover, it is seen as the attempt to pour content and techniques into learners as though they were vessels waiting to be filled (Dizdar 1998, 255). In this framework, the bodies (and emotions, feelings, relationships, and interactions) of translators, of teachers, and of students disappear to clear the way for the reproduction of the text.

One of the first scholars to criticize this understanding of education was Rosemary Arrojo (1994):

[U]nder the aegis of logocentrism, what is implicitly taught to aspiring translators is the notion that the ultimate goal of their work has to be the achievement of the impossible, the achievement of an omnipotence that would produce a translation that could be free from any error and survive the passing of time and any contextual change. Consequently, what traditional theories of translation [sic] end up teaching aspiring translators is that they are preparing themselves to perform a secondary, derivative activity which will never quite reach its goal no matter how hard they try. What traditional theories of translation ultimately teach aspiring translators is that they should not value their work which, in spite of its fundamental role in all aspects of our cultural life and in the relationships between different peoples, has never received its due recognition.

In her analysis, Arrojo questions not only a logocentric notion of translation and education, but also the ethics behind this kind of educational model: if the aim of T&I education is to cultivate experts who play a secondary role in transmitting the meaning of a source text, it is not surprising that T&I classrooms have been characterized by deontological rules such as accuracy, neutrality, or impartiality. In this paradigm of sameness, which shapes ethical questions within the framework of fidelity- and equivalence-based ethics (Koskinen 2000, 16), ethics is understood as
normative ethic–moral statements which call for the faithful or loyal subservience of translators and interpreters to the source text, the author, the client, or the commissioner.

With the essentialism critique and the general focus on difference developed in Translation and Interpreting Studies, the framework of fidelity and neutrality in T&I education was eroded considerably. In a world in which translation and interpreting play a major social role, contributing to the perpetuation or destabilization of power structures, this ethics of “subservience” reaches its limits. Accordingly, researchers like Arrojo (1994) have pointed out that if we assume that translation and interpreting can function as political acts, T&I education has to overcome this framework of fidelity- and equivalence-based ethics and must outline a notion of ethics based on the responsibility of translators and interpreters as social, cultural, and political agents. T&I education then moved towards notions such as visibility (Venuti 1998) and responsibility (Vermeer 1998, 2006, 373–376), which highlight the transformational and productive nature of translation and interpreting, inside and outside the classroom. From such a viewpoint, translating and interpreting are linked to an ethical accountability that assigns to translators and interpreters the responsibility for the potential impact of their professional actions. As such, T&I education is confronted with the need to be attentive to ethical dilemmas and to bring ethical judgement into the classroom (Arrojo 2005; Baker 2011; Baker and Maier 2011; Koskinen 2012; see also Chapter 22 “Ethics in translator and interpreter education” in this volume).

Furthermore, with the essentialism critique, T&I educators perceived the need for finding new forms of education that leave the “transmissionist” educational framework behind (Davies and Kiraly 2006). T&I education moved towards “emancipatory” educational approaches that aimed to empower students by stimulating them to grow as autonomous individuals (Kiraly 2000) and as “emancipated” translators and interpreters, free from the restrictions imposed by the ethics of “subservience” discussed previously (Bahadır 2011a; Abdallah 2011; Koskinen 2012). However, as Biesta (2008) points out, emancipating approaches in education are confronted with another set of ethical tensions that make this emancipating shift problematic. Educators face, for instance, the question of being both faithful and unfaithful to the educational tradition, of both repeating and breaking with the educational canon: on the one hand, students need to continue the legacy, to reproduce the skills and techniques that educators taught them; they engage in mimetic processes and try to imitate the performance of the professionals; educators are committed to safeguarding the translating and interpreting tradition they are part of; they play a representative role in this tradition and provide a model for students to imitate. On the other hand, students ought to have the opportunity to leave this legacy behind and to break with the norm; teachers have to let students change traditions and create something new. This inherent tension in education imposes on educators the ethical challenge of contributing to the perpetuation of established practices and understandings, and at the same time also enabling students to become autonomous and singular professionals able to exercise their individual agency and to change the established tradition and way of thinking.

This tension increases significantly when we consider a second aspect: the pedagogical relationship between educators and students draws on contrasts of both dependence and autonomy. Educators are in the position of defining and directing students, who are relatively subordinate and willing to accept their advice and direction. At the same time, however, students are involved in a process of emancipation, of becoming autonomous translators and interpreters who act for freely chosen reasons and are able to make use of their own reason without direction from someone else. This tension in the pedagogical relationship is based on a paradox of cultivating freedom under constraint, as Kant (2007) had acknowledged: “One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one’s freedom. For constraint is necessary. How do I cultivate freedom under constraint?” (447).
T&I educational researchers attempted to overcome these tensions between preserving tradition and breaking with it, as well as between authority and emancipation, by shifting the attention from teaching to learning processes (Kelly 2010). The shift from a “teacher-centred” to a “learner-centred” approach that took place, especially with the rise of social constructivism in T&I education research (Kiraly 2000), has significantly changed the understanding of what the role of the teacher should be. In strong opposition to the transmissionist understanding mentioned earlier, teaching is now redefined as supporting a “natural” process of learning, just as education is conceptualized as developing “authentic” learning environments (“situated learning”). Yet one problem of this understanding of educational ethics may be that it reduces the role of the teacher to that of a “facilitator” of learning and the role of the student to a “consumer” of learning “services” (Biesta 2006, 19–24). This perception creates an understanding of education in which it becomes difficult to discuss the pedagogical relation between teacher and students: if learning just occurs, educators do not have any role to play.

A way to overcome this perception could be to reflect upon the T&I classroom not within the framework of learning as a cognitive process, but, as we will show in the next section, of a theory of education that instead of concentrating on the learner alone shifts attention to the social relationship between the learner, the teacher, and the institution. Considering T&I education from the perspective of the pedagogical relationship means taking into account the social relations that are established in the classroom and that are triggered by the intentional attempt to foster the development of the students as professionals. This makes another aspect of T&I education evident, which has to be considered when discussing the ethics of education, namely that T&I education is not only a matter of learning, but also of professional socialization.

3 Core issues in ethics of translator and interpreter education: the ethical nature of T&I education

3.1 Between socialization and self-formation

Teaching ethical awareness implies creating pedagogical environments in which students can make decisions, assume responsibility, and reflect on the impact of their actions in a “secure” space (Baker and Maier 2011, 5). Hence, in order to think about ethics, it seems important not only to promote an ethical judgement in the T&I classroom, but also to reflect on the ethical aspects of educating translators and interpreters. This involves analyzing the pedagogical relationships between educators and students from a social perspective. The concepts of socialization and self-formation play a central role here.

On the one hand, education as “socialization,” along with related concepts such as “acculturation,” “civilization,” or “cultivation,” is understood to mean making individuals capable of functioning in a given society. This implies introducing newcomers into an already-existent group by inculcating socio-cultural content along with behavioural dispositions. This particular conceptualization of education is common within the discourse on T&I education. Some authors like Hans J. Vermeer (1986) speak about “professional acculturation” (fachliche Enkulturation) in this context, referring to the social process by which students become professional translators and interpreters (186). Socializing involves, therefore, endowing T&I novice translators and interpreters with the capacities that are necessary for them to “take their place” in the profession, that is to become members of the profession. T&I education is thus an instrument used to obtain a position within the social and economic field. This implies being aware of acting in the “role” as expert in translating or interpreting.
It is interesting to note here that, in sociology, this kind of socializing process is connected to the construction of a social unit (Simmel 1989 [1890]). The integration of newcomers into existing cultural, socio-political, and professional structures secures social and cultural continuity and contributes to the reproduction of existing knowledge and practices. In this context, graduated students can be viewed as the result of the appropriation of professional norms which are necessary for maintaining the cohesiveness of the professional group. T&I education as socialization is associated with the aim of securing the future of the profession and is thus an important part of the T&I professionalization process. From an ethical viewpoint, however, safeguarding existing traditions and knowledge runs the risk of perpetuating a system and transmitting a tradition by excluding what is new, subversive, or different. It also faces the peril of perpetuating asymmetrical power structures as well as “conservative” translation and interpreting concepts and practices.

Moreover, socialization is often a matter of training, of transmitting norms by imparting knowledge, techniques, and skills. In the context of T&I education, these norms are outlined and established in “competence models,” curricula, or institutional practices such as evaluation and assessment. Professional socialization is linked to the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as to the adoption of norms and rules. In this sense, education represents a category of appropriation. This idea of education entails a social functionality, which again can be linked to ethics: if the function of education is limited to achieving a “good” position within the economic and social hierarchies, it is reduced to the relations within the exchange of commodified goods. The consequences of this economic logic of education can be described as a “promise of pleasure and future usability” (Thompson 2005, 522). Education becomes an “investment strategy that will enable us to compete successfully with other individuals for a better position within the social hierarchy” (522).

Socialization also requires an expansion of one’s personal worldview, attitudes, and values to accommodate professional identity. Accordingly, professional acculturation goes hand in hand with a process by which the attitudes and values of a professional culture are internalized. This induction of attitudes and values, however, raises controversial issues. By internalizing the professional culture, T&I students accept both conscious and unconscious tenets that will guide their professional action and form their identity as translators and interpreters.

As already mentioned in the previous section, with the shift in the T&I pedagogical discourse from a teacher-centred to learner-centred education, some measures were proposed to minimize the impact of imposing dominant norms through teaching. In particular, thinkers in education have emphasized that educational practice is not directed at objects being cultivated, but at subjects who act, make decisions, and assume responsibility for their own learning process (Biesta 2013, 18). In this context, education is seen as a “self-formation” process and grounds in the idea that education contributes to the emergence of an autonomous professional. Education is no longer considered an appropriation process by which the students acquire knowledge and skills or internalized norms, attitudes, and values, but as a process that enables students to become individuals who can judge and act freely and justly. It follows that the aim of education in this sense is a development that leads the student to become an increasingly ethically responsible person.

This understanding of education is associated with humanistic goals such as autonomy, sovereignty, and freedom, and it is linked to the basic notion of Bildung, a concept rooted in the German pedagogical tradition, but which is also related to other concepts like “liberal education,” which hold analogous positions in other discourses (Masschelein and Ricken 2003, 151). At the same time, it must be mentioned that the translation of Bildung is not easy; there are rather a number of terms which each emphasize different aspects of the concept. For example, the aspect
of self-formation and self-organization through education is in the foreground of the (constructivist) concept of “autopoiesis”; the idea of fulfilment and personal development is found in the concepts of individual self-production and spiritual self-formation; and the notion of becoming autonomous and responsible is associated with concepts like “empowering” (Thompson 2005, 530). Altogether, education as Bildung is conceptualized as an endless task of unfolding and enlightening the students, so that they can act on their own. This idea of free and unfettered self-realization leads to a view of T&I education as the process and the result of an engagement between the self and the world, by which the self gains new perspectives on the world, allowing it to become more of an autonomous individual. It formulates, therefore, a process of progressive practical self-affirmation and self-determination in and through the world which states that, through education, novice translators become truly more and more themselves. The aim of education is an individual self-realization and self-elevation of the students, who transform themselves from novice translators and interpreters to “experts” and “professionals.” Bildung regards a self-centred process linked to the emergence of selfhood and autonomy through the relation to others within an educational environment. It implies an individual process towards an ideal professional as an autonomous subject acting independently of social and economic determinations, coercions, and constraints. We have discussed it already: from this perspective, educating translators and interpreters is conceived as a critical and emancipatory enterprise, i.e. as a process in which students emancipate themselves from a secondary role as neutral transmitters of information and become responsive professionals.

As already mentioned, these emancipating educational approaches have, in general, been criticized because of the contradiction of conferring to students the power of acting on their own behalf by “authorizing” them to operate on their own. Moreover, the paradoxical process of developing autonomy due to heteronomic forces establishes a relation in which the self is at the same time interpellated both to affirm and to transform itself (Masschelein and Ricken 2003, 148). In addition, this perspective on education is beset with another problem. The idea of the professional translator and interpreter contained in the notion of Bildung remains fundamentally oriented towards the choice of certain attitudes, values, actions, and skills established not by the subject itself but by the professional community. Through individualization and self-formation, a process arises which structures the individual translator and interpreter from the outside. Education remains, also from the perspective of self-formation, in the framework of a socializing process determined by educators and educational institutions. Thus, this “individualization” process cannot be understood in terms of singularity and otherness, but can only be regarded as a particularization of general ideals surrounding the professional translator and interpreter. In consequence, the focus on selfhood and individuality tends to ignore the relationship between education and power. The “humanist” quest for individuality fixes practices and understanding in the T&I field and restrains the ways in which we conceive of ourselves as translators and interpreters. In this context, it must not be forgotten that educating is a form of power (Masschelein and Ricken 2003, 142) and is structured by educational and institutional policies as well as by the politics of translation and interpreting.

### 3.2 Responsibility and an ethics “to come”

Putting together these two tendencies of socializing and self-forming, we can affirm that being educated is related to that process by which we change the relationship to ourselves, to others, and to the world (Wimmer 2001, 154). Education bases on a relationship between the subjects and what is outside them. This implies that education always has to do with intersubjectivity, since it always involves a relationship with the outside world, with the other. Wimmer argues in this sense
that “Bildung can only take place through change, which means it can only take place in relation to that which is without, other, unknown, an alien” (154). However, one of the main problems in thinking about the ethical relation to the other concerns the borders of experience of the world outside and inside ourselves. We are unable to know things-in-themselves, and even often remain opaque ourselves, as Thompson (2005) points out: “Whenever someone addresses us, we are never fully able to make out the meaning of what is said, nor the significance it has for us” (528).

If we assume that the relation to the others is the basis of ethics (Derrida 1978, drawing on Levinas), we have to acknowledge that education is essentially an enterprise related to ethics. Moreover, the encounter between the individual and the other imposes on the subject the ethical obligation of assuming responsibility (Wimmer 2001, 154). But what does it mean to be responsible? From an educational viewpoint, to be responsible is bound up with being accountable and answerable; it is the ability to answer to the call of the students (from the Latin respon- dere, “to respond”). Responsibility is understood here as responsiveness, as the presence of an imperative which demands a response to a concrete situation. Ethical education is a responsible response that shows respect for the concrete particularity of the students in their singularity, this means an involvement and entanglement with the students, an attentiveness. But how can educators respond both to the necessity of respecting the other as an autonomous and singular being and, at the same time, to the necessity of recognizing the other in a pedagogical relation which reduces them to objects of care?

In education, being responsible poses a double bind: the duty to respect difference and singularity, while at the same time maintaining the universality of the educational rules. Responsibility here does not, however, re-establish the strong self-transparent subject, but relates to the impossible experience of the other in its otherness (Derrida 1978; see also Chapter 7 “The ethics of linguistic hospitality and untranslatability in Derrida and Ricœur” in this volume). The concept of responsibility on the basis of education addresses an ethics of the other, not as a code of ethics, but as something that remains “to come” (Bahadır 2007, 213–248). This understanding of ethics acknowledges the fallibility of our actions, without dissolving the challenge of choosing the “appropriate” action. Our ethical responses and positions cannot hope to find final justification or clarification. This ethics “to come” implies rather the cultivation of a self-critical attitude which acknowledges our vulnerability, a vulnerability that is combined with a singular ethical challenge imposed on us, one that acknowledges our at all times partial and situated nature of understanding. This ethics of the other does not assume a sovereign subject but rather refers to an unconditional affirmation of an alterity, an obligation to the singular other.

4 New debates and emerging issues

4.1 Professional ethics and T&I education

Reflecting on the ethical dimensions of education contributes to promoting new debates regarding the ethical dimensions of professionalization as the implicit aim of T&I education. It can also help to question professionalization-oriented thinking as the central legitimation for T&I educational institutions.

A profession consists of a collective body “to which society entrust the solution of a particular kind of problem which requires solving” (Monzó 2011, 12). Professional legitimacy and authority bear, therefore, a responsibility and an ethical commitment. Clients place their trust in professionals, permitting them to do something for them that they are unable to do by themselves, in our case: to speak in their name. To be a member of a profession is to be worthy of the trust of the public in general, and of one’s clients in particular. This trust is bound up with an ethical
bond between the professional and the client. A professional practice is, thus, inherently an ethical one. But what makes professionals, ethically speaking, worthy of trust? What consequences do the different concepts of professionalization have for the ethics of T&I education?

First, professional ethics can be associated with the possession of a shared sense of values and attitudes, to be acknowledged by all practitioners. In our field, there are different ways to describe these shared values and attitudes. In Kiraly’s (2000) notion of professionalism, for instance, the ethical basis of the translating and interpreting profession is mostly contractual. Translators and interpreters enter into a contract with their clients which stipulates the sort of relationship they are building up:

Professionalism . . . would characterize the translator’s ability to work within the social and ethical constraints of translation situation in a manner that is consistent with the norms of the profession. This would involve aspects like the commitment to meet deadlines and to inform a client in due time if a translation will be late, to charge appropriate fees for translational services without either gouging a customer or dumping one’s services on the market to undercut competition.

T&I education aims, in this context, to teach the students to fit these contractual conditions, which are framed in an economic relation taking place on the market. Professionalism is associated with an increased effectiveness by meeting these contractual conditions. Following the professional norms effectively makes novice translators and interpreters appear more expert, and expertise bestows professional legitimacy. Accordingly, professional ethics is based on the possession of special expertise. To learn professional expertise, T&I researchers advocate for learning settings that foreground experiential learning. This can be achieved through “authentic project work” (Gouadec 2007, 327–360; Floros 2011; Kiraly 2016) or even through learning in the workplace. In both cases, students pick up skills and learn to act ethically by working as (semi-)professional translators and interpreters. The ethical challenges of this kind of pedagogical approach refer particularly to the economic and political aspects of these learning settings. If students work professionally or nearly professionally for free in a context in which professional translators and interpreters would demand remuneration, they are acting against the economic interest and status of the profession.

A second form of articulating professional ethics is to associate it with professional phronesis (“practical wisdom”). This notion of becoming virtuous concerns habits and the “right” conduct in social situations, but also the ability to make just judgements. Moreover, in speaking of phronesis we are not only referring to the development towards desirable outcomes that can be quantified through a code of good practice. Professional phronesis as a practical moral wisdom in professional practice is also linked to the development of the professional subject as a whole person. As a holistic quality (Vermeer [2008] 2009), professional phronesis cannot be reduced to stipulations about desirable and undesirable practices. To become practically wise, researchers have proposed experiential or practical educational settings that stimulate students to make situated decisions and embodied judgements. This involves, for instance, engaging with theoretical literature on ethics (Baker 2011, 274–299), problematizing recurrent deontological principles (Martín Ruano 2015), analyzing and discussing ethically ambivalent situations (Drugan and Megone 2011), or writing reflexive translation diaries (Abdallah 2011).

A third aspect in thinking about professional and educational ethics is that professional phronesis cannot be understood as a quality that permits professionals to always succeed. Professionalism is also linked to aspects like vulnerability and impossibility, since interpreters and
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translators perform a speech act that represents the other, that is to say their professionalism consists in giving the promise that they represent the other, that they speak in the name of the other, even though this is not really possible (Dizdar 2009, 98; Bahadır 2010, 133–134, 2011b). Drawing on Derrida (2002a), T&I professionalism can be associated with “to profess,” that is “to make a pledge [gage] while committing one’s responsibility” (214) or, in different words, to make the oath of responding to both the call of the source text and of the target reader seeking for mediation. Therefore the process of becoming a professional and of fostering the development of students as professionals means often teaching and learning to “take on responsibility for the promise that cannot be kept” (Bahadır 2010, 134). For T&I education, this involves that novice translators and interpreters should learn to question the nature of the promise itself (Dizdar 2009, 98). Questions like “Why do I translate?” “For whom?” “Do I translate at all?” need to be part of the T&I classroom. This also implies that T&I students, but also trainers and researchers, need to learn to be critical, committed, active, and thus vulnerable to their own subjectivity (Bahadır 2010, 135). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge “the impossibility of total control over one’s own decision” as well of “controlling the future effects of what the translator has signed in the name of the other” (Dizdar 2009, 98; emphasis added).

Finally, from the perspective of the ethics of education, it is necessary to question the common sense of linking T&I education to the formation of professional translators and interpreters. Associating education with work and occupations runs the risk of reducing it to certain professional profiles in the form of specialized areas that meet the needs of the job market. This leads to a strict fragmentation of T&I education into different territories of expertise. Strongly specialized translators and interpreters master only or essentially only one particular subject. Specialization promises better job opportunities, and then it improves the productivity of the translators and interpreters, making them more attractive for the industry. But it is also beset with the problem of a declining development of general skills that goes hand in hand with an increasing expansion of low-level learning units and highly specialized courses. This polarization of expertise confronts T&I education with a crucial ethical challenge: in a technologized and rapidly changing professional market, a strong specialization faces the peril of becoming out-of-date, even before the students have completed their education. T&I educational institutions would hereby be strongly linked to the economic developments in the industry.

An alternative way of addressing this problem is to consider the aims of T&I education not in the sense of professionalization, but of helping the students to foster a “translatorial way of thinking” (translatorischer Denkstil) and a translational habitus that permits them to develop a critical attitude towards professional and non-professional translation and interpreting processes (Dizdar 2015, 203–208). The attention does not focus on transfer between two fixed unities (languages, cultures, or texts), but on the interactions that transform, and even help to build up these unities as such. This kind of a “translatorial way of thinking” shifts the emphasis on relationships, difference, and heterogeneity; it contributes to question one’s own worldview and, at the same time, highlights the everyday life necessity of translating and being translated. Hence, having a translatorial habitus means being able to reflect about the complexity of translation as an activity of interacting with the other, of crossing cultural, linguistic, or epistemological boundaries, and even of forming these boundaries in a political sense (Dizdar 2019).

4.2 Ethics of curriculum design

A last important issue when speaking about the ethics of education concerns curriculum design and the question of qualification. Curricula and qualification programmes are specifications that educational institutions lay down and that, once completed, allow students to act professionally
as translators and interpreters. Curricula are therefore based on what Hagemann (2016) calls “a specific concept of what superior performance in translation involves.” The range of activities that a student should be able to perform after completing the qualification process—from occupations such as translating highly specialized text on medicine to general considerations regarding ethical and socio-political values—implies certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In T&I education, curricula are frequently articulated using terms like “translation competence.” This notion has a certain rhetorical attractiveness (who would not want to become a “competent” professional?). Another interesting aspect of this concept is that it addresses the practices that translators should be able to perform rather than what they need to know. The concept of competence seems to integrate knowledge, skills, and performances (EMT 2009); it is conceived as a unit that combines theoretical and practical knowledge as well as personal dispositions in a holistic way.

Within higher education, the concept of competence makes it possible to assess and standardize student performances and attitudes. It focuses on the results rather than on the educational process and continues a trend in line with an increasingly evidence-based education linked to standardized accountability and assessments. The predominance of this kind of terminology reflects a cultural change in higher education that is connected to an increasing market orientation, economic competitiveness and effectiveness, growing bureaucracy and lessening democracy within the faculties (Pacheco Aguilar 2017, 117–126). It is therefore not surprising that educational stakeholders use the concept of competence in conjunction with other terms such as “employability” or “learning outcomes.” Under the surface of this terminology lies, however, a dominant call for market orientation, which conceives the aim of T&I education as making the students fit for the industry (Dizdar 2014, 209–210). The concept of competence therefore reflects certain political and economic tendencies which reduce T&I education to a mere fulfilment of the needs of the market (201).

From an ethical viewpoint, it should be mentioned that the objective of qualification and curriculum is to enable students to practice their profession in an unforeseeable future. Hence, an orientation to practice in T&I education should not make us mistake curriculum design either for the description of (current) professional norms and standards or even for an empirical description of professional performance itself. Translation and interpreting students may work in a future in which professional conditions have already shifted. As it is impossible to predict what the profession will be like in the future, it is problematic to prepare students by focusing only on the present needs of the market or even on any established range of present conditions. Specifying from an educational perspective what qualifies students to practice the future profession does not have anything to do with a description of the (professional) present reality, but rather with judgements about what is educationally desirable in relation to a particular constellation of educational purposes (Pacheco Aguilar 2016, 26). This does not mean that students should not be prepared for practicing the profession, but that educators have to assume their ethical responsibility as teachers. This implies thinking not only in economic terms, but also about the social and ethical implications of curriculum design.

5 Conclusion

In T&I education, an awareness of the ethical aspects implies reflecting on one’s own educational institutions, understandings, and practices. Thinking about the ethics in this framework conceptualizes education as an intrinsically ethical enterprise and brings to light the inseparable ties between the relation to the other and ethical responsibility. A T&I education has to take into account the role that T&I educational institutions play in a given society. Educators concerned
with ethics also need to be informed about the discourses legitimizing T&I educational institutions and establishing the goals they strive for. On the level of educational practices, it is also relevant to reflect upon the understandings regarding education, translation, and ethics that influence teaching performance. In closing, reflecting on the ethics of T&I education involves familiarity with ethical challenges and an acknowledgement of the singularity of each decision. It means assuming our responsibility towards something and someone that remains alien to us.

Related topics in this volume

Ethics in translator and interpreter training; research ethics in translation and interpreting studies; professional translator ethics; conference interpreter ethics; ethics of public service interpreting; ethics of activist translation and interpreting; accessibility and linguistic rights; ethics in socialist translation theories.

References


Further reading


This article highlights some ethical dilemmas of educating translators and interpreters from a poststructuralist perspective.


Review of ethical approaches in translator and interpreting training.


By approaching the relationship of Bildung and selfhood Thompson develops a concept of education in which the tension between individualization and social determination is not decided in favour of one over the other, but remains unsettled.