Introduction

Notions of ethics in translation and interpreting are often associated with the practice of translation and interpreting, especially in professional contexts, in which ethical guidance is typically provided by professional codes of ethics or best practices. This approach to ethics is largely deontological, resulting in guidelines or rules against which specific behavior or practices can be evaluated (cf. Pym 1992; Mulayim and Lai 2017). The body of scholarship on the challenges surrounding this normative, rules-based approach to translator and interpreter behavior has continued to expand, with increased recognition of power differentials, bias, and agency within the translator and interpreter’s scope of work, especially in situations of conflict, along with philosophical and empirical challenges to the professional construal of the translator or interpreter as a “neutral conduit” (see Chapter 15 “Ethics in public service interpreting” and Chapter 20 “Ethics codes for interpreters and translators” in this volume).

Much less scholarly attention has been paid, however, to the ethics of researching translation- and interpreting-related phenomena (Hekkanen 2007; Valdeón 2017). This dearth of critical reflection may be the result of translation and interpreting studies having adopted research methodologies from neighboring disciplines – and by extension, the associated ethical practices. Yet, the trans- and interdisciplinary nature of T&I studies, not to mention its transnational dimension, calls for sustained inquiry into discipline-specific research ethics. Moreover, many of the issues that arise in ethical discussions surrounding the practice of translation and interpreting also merit scrutiny within the context of researching translation and interpreting. Several research methods volumes provide a foundation for ethically sound research practices in the field (e.g. Hale and Napier 2013; Saldanha and O’Brien 2014; Angelelli and Baer 2016b; Mellinger and Hanson 2017), which, together with a number of special issues on research methods (e.g. Pedro Rico and Napier 2017; Monzó–Nebot and Wallace 2020; Xiao and Muñoz 2020), are beginning to fill this gap.

In an effort to provide an overview of the current state of research ethics in translation and interpreting studies, this chapter begins with a historical overview of the extant literature. This first section addresses the theoretical considerations related to translation, language, and power that inform contemporary discussions of ethics in the field. The issues raised include the
prevalence of Western bias in dominant research paradigms, the positionality of the researcher and related questions of power and privilege, and the representation of linguistic and cultural difference in acts of translation in research contexts. The chapter then discusses institutionalized practices designed to protect human subjects and to minimize researcher bias throughout the research process, from planning to analysis and dissemination of results. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future directions in translation- and interpreting-related research ethics, which includes the roles that translation and interpreting play in conducting ethical research in neighboring disciplines as well as ethical questions that arise in relation to the dissemination of research results and the sharing of research data.

2 Theoretical considerations: translation, language, and power

Research ethics across the humanities and social sciences today involve consideration of the situatedness and geopolitics of knowledge (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Mignolo 2000; Chakrabarty 2000), including what knowledge gets produced and how that knowledge is circulated, both of which implicitly or explicitly involve issues of translation – i.e. what knowledge gets translated or not and how that knowledge is translated. Many of these issues were first raised in the field of anthropology or in relation to the field of anthropology. In a 1984 address to anthropologists, Edward Said (1989, 213–214) warned against “the heedless appropriation and translation of the world by a process that for all its protestations of relativism, its displays of epistemological care and technical expertise, cannot easily be distinguished from the process of empire.” The ubiquity of translation and interpreting in both data collection and the presentation of ethnographic findings coupled with the traditional power asymmetries between researchers and their informants in ethnographic studies led to some of the earliest reflections on the ethics of translation in research: Asad (1986), Geertz (1983), and James Clifford (1986, 1988). Questions related to translation’s specific role in the representation of the Other were addressed in other fields, including translation studies, by Cheyfitz ([1991] 1997), Niranjana (1992), and Venuti (1992), and more recently by Sturge (1997, 2007), Gentzler (2002), Hermans (2006), Bahadir (2004), and Tymoczko (2006, 2010). (See also Chapter 8 “The ethics of postcolonial translation” and Chapter 29 “Ethics of translating sacred texts” in this volume.) That being said, recognizing the role of translators and interpreters in cross-cultural and cross-lingual research projects continues in many fields to be the exception to the rule (see Casanova and Mose 2017; Bruchac 2018). For example, Smith (2012) illustrates how academic research has appropriated knowledge from indigenous communities and subjugated participants as a result of its intrinsic link with imperialism and colonialism.

Another problem related to these power asymmetries involves Western bias in the methodologies used in cross-cultural and cross-lingual research, ranging from periodizations and terminology to ethical vetting of research projects (Schrag 2010). For instance, Ramanathan (2011) argues that ideological conflict and translation are two ethical dilemmas for researchers in the context of post-colonialism. The first challenge of ideological conflict is related to the data upon which researchers build their arguments, and by extension, which data are omitted. Research, by its very nature, requires scholars to make decisions regarding the scope of a project and the selection of the data on which their claims will be based. The ideological position of the scholars may be at odds with the ideology present in the data, such that researchers may choose to select specific data to support their purposes. Yet the failure to disclose the means by which these data were selected for inclusion or exclusion may result in a lack of transparency that undermines the ethical representation and characterization of the work in question. The second challenge, which Ramanathan terms translation, is related to which data is presented for reception in the
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West. Here, scholars must determine to what extent specific aspects of themselves as researchers and the cultures under consideration are revealed to readers.

Also a central concern for researchers today is the hegemony of English, which not only determines what gets translated and cited (theoretical works in English tend to be far more frequently translated and anthologized than work in other languages), but also compels scholars working in non-hegemonic languages to write in English, leading to epistemological impoverishment (Descarries 2003, 2014) or, in Bennett’s (2007) formulation, epistemicide. Following from Said’s (1982) seminal essay “Traveling Theory,” scholars in the field of translation studies such as Susam–Sarajeva (2002, 2006) have addressed how the hegemony of English and of Anglophone theory has led to the marginalization of non-hegemonic knowledge, typically presented, when presented at all, as a case study or as ethnographic data. This is true even in scholarship concerned with forms of oppression, such as feminism (Reimóndez 2017) and the LGBT rights movement (Baer 2021). These power asymmetries continue to shape research in the field of translation studies in fundamental ways and remain one of the most pressing ethical challenges for scholars working in hegemonic and non-hegemonic languages alike. Indeed, it is one of the great paradoxes of the field that non-hegemonic communities, which typically engage in translation far more than their hegemonic counterparts, “are largely absent as a focus of enquiry from translation theories and histories” (Cronin 2002, 45).

The ethical implications of these power asymmetries are being addressed by researchers in a variety of ways, first, by encouraging greater reflection on the conceptual frameworks being used – do they reflect Western bias in their assumptions or in their analytical categories? – and on the researcher’s positionality, understanding that positionality as complex, characterized by overlapping oppressions and privileges (see hooks 1984 on interlocking oppressions and Crenshaw 1989 on intersectionality). Ramanathan (2011) has called on researchers to revisit their work from the perspective of the ethical challenges faced and to recognize the provisional nature of their findings. To that end, Kim (2012) investigates the researcher’s position with respect to the research community of which he or she is a member, advocating that researchers reveal those relationships to readers when reporting their findings, while Casanova and Mose (2017) argue for greater linguistic reflexivity in ethnographic studies.

In the field of translation and interpreting studies, it is becoming increasingly common for researchers to acknowledge their positionality (see Koskinen 2008; Pokorn 2012), and increasing attention is being paid to the complex positionality – e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, or citizenship – of interpreters in asylum hearings (Jacquemet 2005; Stahuljak 2010), in wartime (Rafael 2007), and in domestic violence hearings (Pozo–Triviño and Fernandes–Del Pozo 2018). This complex positionality, however, need not be seen as a limitation, especially when it endows the researcher with a dual perspective (Winkler 1990; Reimóndez 2017, 51). As Pokorn (2012, 13) comments, the native’s point of view can be

an added value: it can help us see past the embellishments or vilifications of post hoc clarifications and interpretations of past events and deeds. Our embeddedness also does not stop us, through the application of the post-modern hermeneutics of suspicion, from submitting to our doubt everything that imposes itself as generally known, accepted and universal.

This recognition has also led scholars in the field to critically examine their earlier research through the lens of discretionary power (Tiselius 2019).

Reflective ethical research practices also require recognition that knowledge construction is not a solitary act. A variety of voices are typically involved in data collection and the construction of meaning, but those voices are not always represented or problematized. This is especially
relevant with mediated data collection, that is, when interpreters or bilingual research assistants aid in collecting data from informants or research subjects. Smith (2012), in her volume Decolonizing Methodologies, not only makes the methodological argument for rethinking the means by which research of indigenous cultures is conducted but also illustrates through case studies how these approaches can be re-imagined by repositioning indigenous populations as active contributors to knowledge creation rather than as passive subjects of ethnographic inquiry. Bruchac (2018) re-interrogates findings from early anthropologists whose work was based on indigenous informants and credits these individuals for their intellectual contributions. The failure to acknowledge the multiple voices involved in cross-cultural and cross-lingual research risks construing the researcher as an omnipotent arbiter of facts, rather than someone embedded in a dialectic between text, context, and power differentials.

In the field of translation studies, Reimóndez (2017, 51) calls for greater polyphony in the field, so that “no peripheries are created and that ideas travel in a more multi-directional fashion.” To that end, she advocates for more collaborative translation projects not only between hegemonic and non-hegemonic communities, but also between non-hegemonic communities, and for more translator training programs and courses for non-hegemonic languages to support that goal. In fact, we now see the incentivization of such scholarly translation projects, as represented by the Michael Henry Heim Translation Prize sponsored by the academic journal East European Politics & Societies and Cultures. We also see attempts to develop more dialogic and inclusive relationships between researchers and their informants. Turner and Harrington (2000, 253), for example, model research in interpreting that “entails the use of interactive or dialogic research methods which attach appropriate significance to informants’ own agendas and to the sharing of research-driven ‘knowledge.’” Action research is another model that seeks to reimagine a more dialogic and egalitarian relationship between researcher and informants (Nicodemus and Swabey 2016), which we discuss in the final section.

As evident from the previous discussion, ethical issues are now widely discussed in scholarly venues in translation studies, although at present there is no recognized code of research ethics specific to the field; therefore, codes developed in related fields are often used to govern or guide research in translation studies. Some of the more commonly referenced codes are those used in the social sciences, especially those related to research involving human subjects. The emergence of those research codes is commonly described as a response to ethical violations, most prominently as a reaction to biomedical research conducted during World War II. A prime example of a code of ethics developed during this time is the Nuremberg Code (1947), which codifies many of the tenets of commonly accepted best practices in research, including voluntary consent, minimizing risk or harm to subjects, and maximizing benefit. Another biomedical code of ethics that has influenced social science research is the World Health Organization’s 1964 Declaration of Helsinki, which expanded the Nuremberg Code to include protocols specific to clinical trials. This international code provides a set of ethical principles by which researchers ought to be bound when working with human subjects. While these codes are undeniably highly influential in biomedical sciences and have since influenced the social sciences and humanities, Israel (2015) indicates that the atrocities of World War II are not the sole impetus behind the development of research ethics and argues against this reductionist view, proposing a pluralistic view of the development of research ethics both within the biomedical sciences and in other disciplines.

The applicability of these codes of ethics to the humanities and social sciences has been critiqued by scholars across disciplines who have focused on issues of institutionalization and regulation of ethics boards (Schrag 2010), monetization and institutional accountability (Van Den Hoonnaard 2011), and the relevance to specific forms of research such as linguistic ethnography
Research ethics in T&I studies (Copland and Creese 2016). To the extent that research on translation and interpreting spans the humanities and social sciences, T&I researchers need to scrutinize how these codes apply to their work. T&I scholars must also take stock of the immediate regulatory frameworks within which they work so as to comply not only with the ethical requirements of their local university or institution, but also with the larger research communities to which they belong. That is not to say that these codes of ethics are not of value – quite the contrary. However, the various codes of ethics that have been developed to regulate research in behavioral and social science research are not comprehensive in that they do not explicitly address humanistic approaches to research, such as oral histories, interviews, or questionnaires (Schrag 2010). This critique also applies to metrics of scholarly productivity designed in the hard sciences, such as impact factor, h-indices, and citation counts, that do not necessarily capture the scholarly activity in humanistic fields.

3 Core issues and topics

While the previous section has focused on macro-level research ethics and the context in which translation and interpreting studies research is conducted, the main ethical issues addressed in research codes involve the mitigation of risk – i.e. physical and/or emotional harm to human subjects – and research bias, as discussed earlier. While some may view the codes as a kind of checklist, presenting research ethics as a discrete act or set of tasks that must be completed prior to conducting research, in light of our previous discussion, research ethics are better viewed as a vital ongoing part of the entire research endeavor, involving reflection at each stage of the research project. Indeed, reflection and action on ethical issues throughout the research process may improve the quality of the research. Much of the discussion that follows draws on the Belmont Report and the Common Rule, which are two US regulations that are used by institutional review boards to evaluate and oversee research; similar principles underlie other regulations and codes of ethics globally. This section briefly describes best practices in conducting research at each stage, from planning to dissemination of results.

3.1 Planning

As most research methods volumes will attest, the initial planning stages of a research project should consider the ethics of the project. If the project involves human participants, researchers are likely to require approval from an ethics committee or institutional review board (IRB) prior to conducting the work. Regulations surrounding human subjects research vary based on region, country, and institution and are regularly updated (Israel 2015). As a result, researchers should verify the specific requirements for their context. In addition, the topic of research may require additional ethical considerations to be taken into account. For instance, scholars have examined research ethics issues in corpus linguistics (McEnery and Hardie 2011; Hochgesang et al. 2010), applied linguistics (De Costa 2016), and language industry studies (Mellinger 2020). While there is variation among the various ethical regulations, several aspects are relatively constant across social science research, such as risk mitigation, theoretical grounding, and informed consent.

For many research codes of ethics, there is a utilitarian approach to research that aims to maximize benefit for participants while reducing harm. To do so, researchers must demonstrate how potential risk or harm to participants will be mitigated and what steps will be taken to address undue harm should it occur during the study. The initial planning stages of a research project require researchers to anticipate potential risks to participants and to establish protocols to address any should they occur. In the context of translation and interpreting studies, potential
risk to participants can run the gamut from personal or professional embarrassment as a result of a breach of confidentiality or anonymity to emotional discomfort or physical harm. The risks involved in each study are unique to the context, and researchers must be mindful to avoid exposing participants unnecessarily to risk (see Saldanha and O’Brien 2014; Mellinger and Hanson 2017 for extended treatment of these topics). For example, research on interpreting in domestic violence or other criminal hearings may pose emotional risk to research subjects (Tipton 2018), especially minors (Böser and LaRooy 2018).

Critical to the success of sound research is establishing the theoretical framework within which the study will be conducted (Angelelli and Baer 2016a; Muñoz 2016). In line with the reflexive practices described in the previous section, critically situating the research and the researcher in the extant literature is a crucial first step and may provide guidance on research protocols to mitigate risk. Failure to engage the extant literature ultimately impacts the viability of the study and subsequent dissemination of the results, thereby exposing human participants to undue risk by participating in a study that might not advance the scholarly community’s understanding of the phenomena under consideration.

Perhaps one of the most commonly cited aspects of ethical research practices involving human participants is informed consent. At its core, informed consent involves ensuring voluntary participation in a study (Faden and Beauchamp 1986). In many cases, this process involves providing information about the goals and objectives of the study, along with the potential risks and benefits of participation. Potential participants usually review a written document that contains this information and should have the chance to ask for any clarification prior to signing the consent form. Informed consent as a process is the subject of considerable reflection (cf. Candilis and Lidz 2009; Grady 2015; Resnick 2015), particularly with regard to ensuring that participants fully understand the associated risks and their ability to withdraw from a study. Likewise, discussions of informed consent are also linked to the voluntary will of a participant to enroll in the study without coercion. Due to space considerations, these topics cannot be addressed in detail here, but several of the previously mentioned research methods volumes in translation and interpreting studies discuss informed consent, voluntary participation, and vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, such as minors, victims of crime and domestic violence, ethnic minorities, hospital patients, students, and asylum seekers.

### 3.2 Conducting

Research ethics also figure into the actual conduct of research. For research that is overseen by ethics committees or institutional review boards, the most obvious feature of conducting ethical research is adherence to the stipulations and protocols that were approved by these regulatory bodies. Protocols related to recruiting participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and managing data are safeguards designed to mitigate risk to participants and help ensure that collected data are minimally biased or affected by the data collection process. Data collection, management, and storage may also be limited by legal or regulatory policies (e.g. the 2016 General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union protects personal data and its use). Moreover, researchers who adhere to the agreed-upon stipulations during the approval process can more confidently report the research procedures upon the conclusion of the study to enhance the replicability of their work.

As part of the informed consent process, participants are typically provided the opportunity to withdraw from research studies at any time without penalty. The ability to withdraw consent during the research process is imperative to maintain participant autonomy and to ensure that
they have not been coerced to participate. Moreover, this option for participants mirrors the idea that informed consent is an ongoing process rather than a one-time act that cannot be revoked (cf. Resnick 2015).

In some instances, participants may be incentivized to participate with pecuniary or non-pecuniary benefits. These incentives are often useful to recruit enough participants to take part in a study; however, they have ethical implications (Grant and Sugarman 2004; Head 2009). For instance, incentives may be seen as a form of coercion or may undermine the ability of researchers to maintain the anonymity of research participants (see Roberts and Allen 2015). Moreover, incentives that can only be received upon successful completion may compel participants to remain a part of the study for longer than they initially wanted to be involved. In the case of student participants, extra credit and the potential influence on their final grade illustrate the power differential between the student as participant and the instructor as researcher. Consequently, these issues need to be carefully considered when conducting the study.

Despite the best efforts of researchers to mitigate risk, accidents and adverse events occur. The regulations on whether a study should be discontinued based on adverse events or unexpected outcomes vary on a case-by-case basis, but researchers must be mindful that deviations from research protocols need to be evaluated and, in many instances, reported (Shamoo and Resnik 2015). One extreme example of the adverse events and unexpected outcomes of a psychological study is the Stanford prison experiment conducted in 1971. This study was conducted by Philip Zimbardo, who aimed to investigate the influence of perceived power in a prison setting. College students who were enrolled in the study were assigned to be guards or prisoners in a mock prison setting that was set up in a college psychology building. After a short time, the participants who were assigned to be guards began to mistreat the other students enrolled in the study. While the study was initially planned to last two weeks, it was discontinued after six days (for a full account, see Zimbardo 2007). Since then, additional research ethics regulations have been implemented to avoid harm and mistreatment of participants in research studies.

Conducting ethical research, however, extends beyond compliance with ethical approvals for human subjects. There are ethical issues that surround data collection in text-based or data-driven studies, such as corpus linguistics, literary analysis, or big data. In the context of corpus linguistics, researchers must contend with copyright and ethical issues when compiling a corpus. Texts included in a corpus may contain personal, identifiable information of participants who might not have consented for their work to be reused in this manner (McEnery and Hardie 2011). Researchers might need to anonymize or de-identify data in the corpus or adopt specific strategies when sharing built corpora or reporting results to minimize issues surrounding the identity of text authors. Oral corpora or signed language corpora pose a greater challenge in this regard, as the voices, timbre, and tone of speakers might be more readily identifiable, despite the removal of specific identifiers of the speakers. In signed language corpora, videos are typically used, further complicating the ability of researchers to de-identify speakers who do not wish to be included (Hochgesang et al. 2010). More recently, studies involving big data analytic techniques have raised ethical questions regarding applicable ethical frameworks and regulations. Metcalf and Crawford (2016) outline the ethical debates regarding big data techniques, discussing several contentious examples such as the emotional contagion study conducted by Facebook in which users were enrolled in a study without their knowledge and the big data triangulation techniques used to identify the artist Banksy who had sought to remain anonymous. Those ethical issues are likely of interest to translation and interpreting studies researchers working with big data and employing artificial intelligence and machine learning.
3.3 Analyzing

The call for more empirical research in translation and interpreting studies over the past twenty years, along with the incursion of big data and empirical methods in the humanities (e.g. in the form of digital humanities), have made the ethical analysis of research data a pressing concern. For example, one of the more trenchant critiques of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which typically relies on analysis of large digitized corpora, is that the researcher will almost inevitably find evidence to support what she is looking for (see Mason 2016), and that word frequency lists can be misleading if the valence of the words is not analyzed using concordances. Moreover, researchers today find themselves working with both quantitative and qualitative data, each requiring ethical treatment specific to the type of data. Many of the research volumes in the field (e.g. Hale and Napier 2013; Saldanha and O’Brien 2014; Angelelli and Baer 2016b; Mellinger and Hanson 2017) provide guidance on how collected data should be analyzed in an ethical way in line with best practices. When analyzing either qualitative or quantitative data, scholars need to be mindful that their analytical methods align with the research questions or hypotheses of the study itself. Data need to be treated in accordance with best practices in their respective disciplines, and current research methods scholarship should be consulted to facilitate this process. For example, quantitative data analyses should be conducted that are appropriate to the research design and method that were used in the study. In adjacent disciplines, such as health sciences and psychology, there are increased calls for pre-registering studies so that researchers know how data will be analyzed prior to data collection (Nosek et al. 2018). These calls aim, in part, to counteract data mining or fishing expeditions – i.e. the use of statistical methods to generate results without a guiding research question – and instead allow researchers to document how results were obtained. Likewise, Panter and Sterba (2011) present guidelines on best practices for ethical quantitative analysis across a range of statistical techniques and designs. The guidelines that many of these authors present are an effort to present a holistic view of the results so as to avoid cherry-picking results in the service of an argument.

Qualitative researchers have called for similar rigor in the analysis of data. For instance, Miller, Birch, Mauthner, and Jessop (2012) bring together scholars across a range of academic disciplines to examine the ethical challenges and imperatives of conducting qualitative work. The authors point out the challenges facing qualitative researchers in light of the growing prevalence of technology in research and “ethics creep” from the social sciences – i.e. qualitative researchers are being compelled to consider the kinds of ethical questions discussed earlier, which they had not traditionally addressed – while advocating for greater rigor and integrity in research. For example, Irwin (2013) reflects on how qualitative data are embedded and situated in a larger social context, thereby requiring epistemological thought on the nature of qualitative data itself. Calls for this type of work echo the need for ethical reflection on issues related to issues of language and power in the field of translation studies as outlined in the previous section.

3.4 Reporting

Once data analysis is complete, scholars should aim for transparency in how their results were obtained. Research methodologists in various disciplines have developed best practices surrounding reporting guidelines (e.g. PRISMA and CONSORT guidelines); translation and interpreting studies scholars ought to review these guidelines to conform with ethical reporting principles. The information that is reported in a study is likely to vary depending on the methods used, but the general principles of transparency and replicability are useful to guide this discussion.
It should be noted that transparency and replicability are closely related. Transparency in regard to data collection and analysis ensures that a study can be replicated, so as to confirm or refute the reported results. Transparency and replicability are therefore key to a researcher’s ethical participation within a scholarly research community. And so, research that involves quantitative or qualitative data ought to report the provenance of the data, the methods used to analyze the data, and the rationale for these methods. This type of reporting requires researchers to engage with literature specific to research methods to justify how the data were analyzed. Furthermore, transparency in quantitative data analysis requires that any statistical testing be reported in full. In translation and interpreting studies, Mellinger and Hanson (2017) follow current best practices in the statistics literature to advocate for reporting both significant and non-significant results, as well as effect sizes and confidence intervals. This type of reporting provides greater insight into the methods used and allows the scholarly community to evaluate whether the conclusions drawn are in line with the methods used to make these claims. Likewise, full reporting of statistical testing prevents researchers from overinterpreting the results of a study, limiting much of the discussion to support or refute the research questions under discussion. Similar issues are raised by researchers such as Oakes and Ji (2012) and Zehnalová and Kubátová (2019) in relation to corpus studies in translation and interpreting studies, and researchers working with these methods will need to report on the representativeness of their data and sample size.

Similarly, the means by which the results were obtained should be reported, particularly if analytical software or statistical packages are used during data analysis. For example, researchers should provide the name of corpus software (e.g. AntConc, WordSmith Tools) or data coding software (e.g. nVivo) when describing their methods. Statistical packages such as SPSS or R should also be explicitly mentioned, as should any of the extensions or packages that allowed for more sophisticated analyses. Moreover, any data collection tools used, such as eye trackers, keystroke loggers, or MRI equipment, should be described. The rationale for their inclusion is again one of transparency and replicability; researchers working with different tools under different conditions may obtain different results using the same data if the analytical techniques are not reported.

In line with the calls for reflexive research ethics, any ethical challenges may merit inclusion in the final report of a project. In the simplest of cases, researchers may simply report that a specific research project was reviewed by an ethics review board, or that they followed a specific set of ethical principles when conducting their work (e.g. Olohan 2011). In other cases, ethical dilemmas and their ultimate solution can be described either within the article itself or as a separate extended treatment (e.g. Bendazzoli 2016; Tiselius 2019). In both cases, explicit recognition of research ethics as part of the research process inspires greater confidence in the results.

3.5 Disseminating, reviewing, and citing

Insofar as the ultimate goal of a research project is to share the results in order to improve our understanding of a specific topic or to propose solutions to challenges faced by the relevant community, research ethics must extend through the dissemination process, and researchers must be mindful to adhere to the commonly accepted ethical principles involved in the publication process. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE; publicationethics.org) is a non-discipline-specific entity that provides guidance and support to academic journals, researchers, and publishers in this regard, particularly with regard to three academic integrity violations that occur with the most frequency: plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification.
The US Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Research Integrity (ori.hhs.gov/definition-misconduct; emphasis original) defines these three terms as research misconduct, and characterizes them as follows:

Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.

a) Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.
b) Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
c) Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.
d) Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

While scholars are likely to nod in agreement that these practices are detrimental and unethical, the unfortunate reality is that translation and interpreting studies are not immune to these issues. It is difficult to assess the extent to which academic misconduct occurs in the field since many of these issues are seen only by journal editors and peer reviewers prior to publication; however, there are documented cases.

For instance, Valdeón (2019) describes several instances of recent academic misconduct in the field of translation and interpreting studies, pointing out the following ethical concerns: predatory journals that publish works without a standard vetting or review process; an author’s simultaneous submission of a single work to two or more journals; established scholars’ unwillingness to review manuscripts; and honorary authorship, which attributes authorship to someone who contributed little or nothing to the work. As the number of translation and interpreting studies publications continues to increase, these issues will require greater attention on the part of scholarly associations, publishers, and the research community as a whole.

Another area of ethical concern raised by Valdeón (2019) is citation practices, particularly as they relate to self-citation and citation networks. As mentioned previously, research must be grounded in the extant literature, and credit for previous work needs to be given to scholars who have laid the foundation for current work in the area. The provenance of these ideas needs to be attributed, typically in the form of citations to previous work. There are, however, regrettable citation practices such as citation stacking and citation cartels in which authors inflate citation counts to their own work through superfluous self-citation or by mutual agreement among a group of researchers, or citation suppression, in which the scholarship of relevant authors is systematically ignored (Haustein and Larivière 2015; see also Moed 2005). Self-citation is not an inherently bad practice; researchers may be extending a previously made argument or building on previous work. Scholars should be mindful, however, to cite relevant research of other researchers to present a comprehensive overview of work that has been done in the area, although we recognize that works from dominant languages are often more frequently cited for reasons that have more to do with cultural capital than academic value, as discussed in the earlier section on the geopolitics of knowledge. The peer review process is one ethical safeguard in place to help avoid these issues, although it faces its own ethical challenges (Souder 2011).

A final ethical consideration during the process of dissemination is that of informing research participants of the results of the study. Ideally, this process would be ongoing, but this is often not the case. In some ethical review committees, researchers are required to debrief with research subjects about the results of a study upon its conclusion. The argument has been made that this
is an ethical imperative (Fernandez, Kodish, and Weijer 2003), and that research should not be published exclusively in venues that are inaccessible to the general public. Increased calls for open access publications to allow for the dissemination of publicly funded research have led to renewed and vigorous debates surrounding the ethics of open access publishing (Shaw and Elger 2018; see also Piwowar et al. 2018). Translation and interpreting studies will need to contend with many of these ethical concerns, and researchers should be mindful of the current state of academic publishing as the debates surrounding these issues continue to evolve.

4 New debates and emerging topics

While many of the challenges and issues surrounding research ethics at the macro- and micro-levels are of continuing importance in the field, several newer debates are emerging with regard to research ethics in translation and interpreting studies, such as the role of translation and interpreting in conducting research within and beyond disciplinary boundaries, the re-analysis and sharing of data, and action research. These three issues have not yet received significant attention in the field; however, each will be briefly described in the hope that they serve as points of departure for scholars moving forward.

First, translation and interpreting form part of the informed consent process in a variety of fields, and the quality of these language services may have an impact on research and ethical compliance. Kaufert, Kaufert, and LaBine (2009) note the lack of attention paid to translation and interpreting services in maintaining ethical relationships with participants in biomedical studies. Some scholars outside of translation and interpreting studies have taken note of the positive impact interpreters can have on obtaining informed consent (e.g. Lee et al. 2017), while others have noted the ethical tensions that arise from the inclusion of an interpreter in medical settings (Barwise, Sharp, and Hirsch 2019). Mack et al. (2013) have shown the efficacy of focus group testing in refining translations created for HIV prevention. In many cases, however, this scholarship does not take into account research conducted by T&I scholars, which is perhaps no surprise given the fact that explicit reflection on translation and interpreting remains an exception even in the field of ethnography (see Casanova and Mose 2017). As research ethics guidelines and protocols continue to be revised, translation and interpreting scholars have an opportunity to lend their expertise to inform best practices in research methods and ethics.

Second, the use, reuse, and sharing of data is another practice that requires greater scrutiny with regard to research ethics. In many cases, participants consent to provide data that are collected to address a specific set of research questions or hypotheses. The labor-intensive, and at times, costly process of collecting data raises questions as to whether data should be reused or repurposed to examine other research questions. Ethical issues surrounding the reuse of data have been examined by scholars in a number of disciplines (e.g. Bishop 2009; Yardley et al. 2014; Corti et al. 2014), and translation and interpreting research may need to grapple with many of the same topics. Corpus studies often rely on a compiled corpus to examine multiple features of language; however, as mentioned earlier, ethical issues surrounding corpus compilation must be addressed in light of the potential for data reuse. Scholars must also reflect on data repositories and the ethical implications of making data available, particularly in the case of proprietary or sensitive information that participants might not have initially consented to during the informed consent process (Mellinger 2020).

A third area of research ethics that has not yet been explored in great detail in translation studies is the notion of action research, which in the realm of T&I practice and pedagogy seeks to empower the practitioner or teacher to generate data to inform their practice. Such participatory approaches provide opportunities for researchers to work in conjunction with
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their research participants to effect meaningful change (Wurm and Napier 2017). However, as Nicodemus and Swabey (2016) note, such projects sometimes face difficulty when undergoing ethical review, which traditionally enforces a strict separation of researcher from informant and might generate tension between codes of research ethics. While the ethical challenges associated with these collaborative approaches to research have yet to be seriously explored in translation and interpreting studies, scholars working in other areas have begun to do so (e.g. Khanlou and Peter 2005; Brydon-Miller 2008).

Scholars will need to contend with the potential conflict between various approaches to ethics as they conduct this type of research in the field, particularly given the interaction and influence that researchers have on the communities with which they interact. These three emerging topics are by no means exhaustive, and many of the issues related to research ethics raised in this chapter are likely to require additional investigation. Moreover, ethics are embedded throughout the entire research process, and scholars conducting work in translation studies will need to attend to these ethical micro-level considerations throughout each phase of the research process, while being mindful that the macro-level context in which T&I research is embedded will ultimately influence and constrain their work.

Related topics in this volume

Paternity issues; copyright; plagiarism; ethics of translator and interpreter training; codes of ethics and ethics.

Notes

1 2 trials of war criminals before the Nuremberg military tribunals under control council law no. 10, at 181–182 (1949).

References


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Research ethics in T&I studies


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Further reading


This book presents an overview of research ethics guidelines for a number of countries while highlighting the importance to move beyond regulatory compliance to ensure research integrity in the social sciences.


This book draws on theories of ethical decision-making to address a range of situations commonly encountered in the research process and introduces guided dialogue as a means to engage with issues that arise during the research endeavor.


This edited collection is an up-to-date view of ethical guidelines when collecting, analyzing, and reporting different types of quantitative data.


This monograph explores the intersection of research methods and imperialism, describing Western bias in research methods while destabilizing the position of researchers as the sole arbiters and creators of knowledge.