1 Introduction

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) with his deconstruction and Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) with his hermeneutic theory of interpretation can be seen as the two central figures in 20th-century continental philosophy who have contributed to the study of translation as a philosophical and ethical question. Of the two approaches, deconstruction has been given a much more prominent position in translation studies than has the notion of translation ethos by Paul Ricœur, as evidenced by various introductory textbooks and handbooks on translation studies (see e.g. Gentzler 1993; Pokorn 2003). This prominence given to Derrida may create “an impression of relevance and popularity, but in reality, deconstruction is little known, poorly understood and seldom bears influence in mainstream TS thinking” (Koskinen 2018). Likewise, the relative absence of Ricœur is not to be understood as an indication of lesser relevance of his views. In this chapter we discuss these two approaches together, teasing out both their differences and their commonalities with the aim of presenting a coherent overview of the continental philosophical perspective on the issue of ethics in translation and of tracing the influences both have had within translation studies.

While Derrida’s project of deconstruction challenged all great philosophical systems from the position of postmodern, dispersed subjects, who no longer believed in the limitless power of human reason, finding themselves in the deconstruction of all great systems and grand narratives, Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology and hermeneutic theory of interpretation were more focused on a way these subjects understand their relations to the world and to others that coexist with them in a particular moment in time. Derrida addressed the issue of translation briefly in several essays, however most exhaustively in the essay “Des Tours de Babel,” published in 1985 in French and English version. Similarly, although Ricœur had written some 20 books and 600 essays in all, in which translation found its place in his ethical agenda (e.g. Ricœur 1996), he also devoted only one work, “Sur la Traduction” (2004; “On translation” [2006]) exclusively to the issue of the possibility of the transfer of meaning from one language to another.

Both philosophers knew and were critical of each other’s work, in particular regarding the issue of the referential power of metaphor. They encountered each other on several roundtables...
from 1971 onwards; however, they were never able to engage in a fruitful dialogue. While they both agreed that any attempt to recover all determinations in linguistic mediation is bound to failure, they disagreed on its relative success: for Derrida mediation is qualified as *différance* that prevents any safe transition and renders translation both necessary and impossible; for Ricœur, although he too admits that mediation never reaches an absolute degree, translation is more possible than impossible (Pirovolakis 2010, 4). Although, similarly to Derrida, Ricœur states that complete and ultimate translation is impossible and theoretically incomprehensible, he nevertheless argues that it is *practicable* (Ricœur 2006, 13–14) and that complete mediation remains a task the translator needs to pursue.

Whereas theoretical focus on translation arrives late in Ricœur’s academic career, for Derrida engagement with translation issues is particularly explicit in his mid-career in the 1980s. This is quite logical in two senses: first, Derrida had himself been subject to increasing translation activity into English and other languages, encountering at first hand the *aporias*, supplementarities and transformations entailed in translating his work. Second, his philosophical project that revolved around language philosophy, semantics, text analysis and close reading was naturally inclined to address translation as well. Koskinen (2018) defines deconstruction as a way of reading:

Deconstruction can be seen as a mind-set, a systematic way of reading texts closely, critically and paying particular attention to the *aporias* and moments of *différance* in them (see e.g. Koskinen 1994; Davis 2001). This reading requires the reader to acquire an extensive understanding of the text’s context, relational network and contemporary reception, as well as to practice a careful method of reading that resists smooth progress and easy interpretations, and instead goes against the grain of the text, attentive to the blind spots, double meanings and internal contradictions that allow the text to mean more and differently than the author intended.

The idea of texts meaning “more and differently” has numerous consequences for translation, and for translation ethics. The understanding of the source text as unstable and undecided unsettles any simple notion of fidelity as re-rendering or repetition. And taking the idea of meaning more to its logical conclusion in translation evokes the Benjaminian idea of translation as the *sur-vival* and *supplement* of the source text (Benjamin [1923] 2000; Derrida 1985), viewing translation not only from a perspective of loss but also from that of gain.

Because of its radical open-endedness, deconstruction has been seen as nihilistic and unethical by many. This view is a simplification, as we aim to show in this chapter (see also Derrida 1988). In translation studies, the radical rethinking of translation in deconstruction has been particularly fruitful in creating new openings and a renewed interest in the ethics of translation in the 1990s and onwards. Scholars have approached the challenge of translation and ethics posed by deconstruction from different angles, focusing on *empowerment* (Arrojo 1998), *undecidability* (Jones 2004), and *responsibility* (Koskinen 2000). In terms of translation ethics, it may be that Derrida’s later writings offer a more optimistic and more enriching view to translation issues than his earlier views on writing and translating. This is also where similarities with Ricœur’s ideas begin to emerge. In contrast to Derrida, Ricœur’s philosophy can be characterized as encouraging. Ricœur’s core concept of linguistic hospitality, in particular, resonates with Derrida’s deconstructive reading of hospitality, bringing to light how these two philosophers aim at similar ethical encounters across language barriers, and they also share an understanding of the challenges of successfully doing so, but one does so with a more positive outlook and the other never loses his characteristic systemic doubt.
2 Historical trajectory of Derrida’s and Ricœur’s thought

Derrida saw the postmodern subject as someone whose former trust in the limitless power of human reason was shattered. Through detailed close readings of texts, focusing on the points where a line of argument breaks down to reveal incongruities and inner contradictions, Derrida’s deconstructive method attempted to reveal the inconsistencies and fissures within seemingly solid structures of all great systems, including the grand Enlightenment narrative that marked the modern era. His deconstruction thus became the most praised theoretical approach of the postmodern age, which, contrary to the modern era that was characterized by the overwhelming presence of a scientific thought, faced the world which could not provide immediate and comprehensible answers to our reason and understanding and was thus defined by Jean-François Lyotard as “incredulity toward metanarrative” (Lyotard 1984, xxiii–xxiv).

For translation studies scholars Derrida’s work is particularly interesting since it focused on language: his deconstruction was, in fact, a particular method of textual analysis involving the close reading of texts through which he showed that texts that on surface may appear clear and coherent, in fact, often say the opposite of what they wanted to say initially – his reading of Roman Jakobson’s “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” of Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” and of the Biblical story of the tower of Babel is a fine example of his methodology in use (Derrida 1985). Contrary to structuralists, Derrida claims that the signifier only partially covers the meaning of the signified, which is eternally evasive and escapes any final definition into an endless play of signifiers. But since, according to Derrida, the signifieds dwell only in language, this means that they are nothing but signifiers that refer to, and at the same time avoid, the full grasp of other signifiers. The meaning becomes elusive and intangible: we try to capture it with words, words are then again explained by words which never fully fulfill the task and are themselves constantly inadequately explained, thus forming an inescapable circle. Derrida celebrates this free play of language, which he defines as an endless, eternal *différance* of meaning. Derrida’s neologism *différance* thus denotes the double effect of writing where signs are defined based on the fact that they differ one from the other, and where meaning of the signs is deferred or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers (Derrida 1982). Derrida’s aim is therefore to reveal the basic phantasm of our time: identity and sameness between the signifier and signified, between the expression and its meaning, have never existed nor will exist as something graspable, known or understood. Meaning “is always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity” (Venuti 1995, 17–18). Plurality of meanings and complexity are intrinsic to every interpretation of textual meaning, so that our desire for dominance and univocity inevitably fails in the last instance and capitulates to the plurality, elusiveness, equivocity and fuzziness of language (cf. Derrida 1989). As a result, Derrida challenges every definition of translation which defines translation as re-creation or transference of the original “meaning.” Translation is, according to him, an event revealing that the language constantly adapts and changes the original text. Moreover, translation shows that we cannot ever truly know and understand what the original text wants to name. Translation becomes “necessary and impossible” (Derrida 1985, 170).

Through his play of deconstruction Derrida thus attempted to discredit every affirmation, to negate without cessation, to leave all possibilities open, never to take the final decision, never to mark his position, trying to remain in the place of eternal oscillation. Derrida argued that the position of a philosopher should be “emancipated from every external power (not lay, not secular), for example from dogmatism, orthodoxy or religious authority” (Derrida 1996, 16). Through his deconstruction, Derrida aimed to disrupt all univocal classifications typical of what he called the logocentric bias of Western philosophy, and in his writings he therefore insisted...
on the “undecidability,” on the non-position, experiencing “the impossible possibility of the impossible” (Derrida 1992, 290; 1993, 32).

If Derrida was the philosopher who developed a thought that best reflected the fragmented state of a late-20th-century sceptical post-modern subject, his contemporary Paul Ricœur is the main representative of what is sometimes described as phenomenology’s late-20th-century “theological turn” (Wall 2005, 17). Like Derrida, Ricœur was defined by some scholars as a post-structuralist (e.g. Clark 1990, 5–7); however, unlike Derrida, Ricœur did not see meaning as unstable and completely undefinable (Sweeney 2002). Ricœur was a philosopher and a Christian, whose thought was informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition of Western Europe. He described his work as pertaining to phenomenology, hermeneutics and reflexive philosophy, i.e. focusing on how we understand ourselves in relation to our world (see Wall 2005). As a former prisoner of war in Germany during the Second World War, he was someone who was not afraid to take political positions, e.g. against fascism, Communist oppression, colonialism and war in Algeria. In his long career, he got interested in various different topics: his works thus focused on the freedom of the will, the unconscious, personal identity, the question of evil and justice, the relation of faith and reason, and countless other topics, including the problem of language.

Ricœur was also a translator from Greek, German (he translated a book of Husserl during his imprisonment in a German camp) and Italian, and he also practiced translation into English (Scott-Baumann 2009, 2; Pellauer and Dauenhauer 2016). But, in spite of translation having always been a part of his life, he devoted himself theoretically to this subject only later in life.

Translation and communication are, according to Ricœur, always possible. On one hand, the text creates a world of its own, no one has the ultimate control over its intended meaning, and there is the absence of demonstrable identity of meaning of the text; on the other hand, translation creates a paradoxical equivalence without total adequacy, and some trace of meaning is transferred through translation. Moreover, he believes that a text provides only certain interpretational possibilities and that not all interpretations are acceptable, since “not only can we say the same thing in another way, but we can say something other than what is the case” (Ricœur 2006, 28; emphasis original).

This emphasis on the fact that the meaning can be distorted on purpose reveals another important facet of Ricœur’s work – the ethical dimension. Indeed, the guiding thread that runs through Ricœur’s numerous writings is his emphasis on ethics that he defines as “a good life, with and for others, within just institutions” (Ricœur 1992, 172), which means that we should strive to be true to ourselves, but at the same time we should show the same concern and care for our neighbour and seek justice for others in the society we all live in. Ricœur argues that we should be ethically engaged to create a better society through “crossed narration,” i.e. we should try to understand and acknowledge the perspectives of others, including the way they see themselves and us. In addition to sharing narratives about each other, we also need to exchange memories. Through the shared reinterpretation of the past we should attempt to understand the suffering of the others and reach forgiveness since the power of forgiveness “consists in shattering the law of the irreversibility of time by changing the past, not as a record of all that has happened but in terms of its meaning for us today” (Ricœur 1996, 10). And the third model that, according to Ricœur, could help reconcile nations is “translation ethos” or “ethics of linguistic hospitality” (Ricœur 1996, 5).

Ricœur defines translation, like Schleiermacher does, not only as a transfer from one language to another, but also as a transfer of meaning within one’s own language. When engaging more than one language, translation performs transference from the mental universe of one culture to that of another, taking into account all the significant features of the source-language culture, including “its customs, fundamental beliefs and deepest convictions.” In performing
The ethics of linguistic hospitality

This task, translation becomes, according to Ricœur, an ethical paradigm. He writes, “Indeed, it seems to me that translation sets us not only intellectual work, theoretical or practical, but also an ethical problem” (Ricœur 2006, 23). He therefore defines translation in ethical terms as “a matter of living with the other in order to take that other to one’s home as a guest” (5). The goal of a translation ethos is thus “to repeat at the cultural and spiritual level the gesture of linguistic hospitality” (Ricœur 1996, 5), whose aim is to help us breach the confines of our own linguistic traditions and open ourselves to those who speak other languages, have other traditions, beliefs and convictions while preserving our differences. And, according to Ricœur, the irreducible pluralism of cultures and languages, manifested, for example, in contemporary Europe, deserves to be protected (Ricœur 1996, 4).

Scott-Bauman (2009, 107) discerns in Ricœur’s work on translation three main areas of ethical engagement: translation facilitates “linguistic hospitality,” it represents an act of tolerance, and it accepts ultimate untranslatability. And indeed, for Ricœur the plurality of human languages is not a curse, but a gift that allows translation to reconstitute the plurality of human discourse in its unity and allows for an ethics of linguistic hospitality that demands responsibility toward others and gives birth to mutual recognition (Ricœur 2004, 19–20, 42–43; Jervolino 2006).

Translation is thus an ethical task: it is the result of the practice of linguistic hospitality, resulting from the double gift: the gift of the mother tongue and that of foreign languages, which allows us to engage ourselves in an act of linguistic hospitality through which we open ourselves to welcome meanings different from our own. Therefore, translation constitutes an act of tolerance, since by means of translation we attempt to understand the point of view of the other. And finally, every act of translation presupposes the acceptance of the fact that there is no absolute translatability. Ricœur argues that a “good translation can aim only at a supposed equivalence that is not founded on a demonstrable identity of meaning. An equivalence without meaning” (Ricœur 2006, 22). Although translators accept this unavoidable limitation, they nevertheless try to practice translation, and are therefore comparable to peace workers: “Despite fratricides, we campaign for universal fraternity. Despite the heterogeneity of idioms, there are bilinguals, polyglots, interpreters and translators” (Ricœur 2006, 18).

3 Core issues and topics in translation studies

In the 1990s, many scholars aiming to forward the young discipline of translation studies were searching for theoretical foundations from a number of philosophical and cultural theories with a poststructuralist bend. Alongside postcolonial and feminist approaches, deconstruction was also among the sources for inspiration (Koskinen 2000; Davis 2001). The notion of translation as both supplement and loss, as both a poison and a cure, resonated with a number of scholars looking for surpassing pre-theoretical discussions centred on the concept of fidelity and searching for new ways of thinking about translation ethics. Similarly, deconstructive unpacking of hierarchical binary oppositions resonated in a field struggling with permanent inferiority issues (Simeoni 1998) as it offered a way of challenging the authority of the source text author. In her article on postmodern theory and translation, Rosemary Arrojo (1998) links the rise of translation studies directly to the dominance of postmodern theories and their anti-essentialist take on texts and their meanings, and she uses deconstruction to dismantle the binary logic of (high) theory and (low) practice to urge translation and translators to fully engage with their transformative potential.

Arrojo’s international articles such as the aforementioned were preceded by several publications on deconstruction in Portuguese (e.g. Arrojo 1992). These largely went unnoticed by
the international TS audience, and only quite recently one of them was translated into English (Arrojo [1993] 2012).

Another early contribution to deconstruction in translation studies was Koskinen 1994, but it was only in her PhD dissertation (Koskinen 2000) that the ethical weight of taking the worldview and methodology of deconstruction seriously was extensively discussed, leading to an emphasis on self-reflexivity and personal responsibility for translation decisions as fundamentals of a postmodern ethics of translation. This deconstructive stance has led both Arrojo and Koskinen to promote a translation pedagogy enriched by critical pedagogy:

Some form of “critical pedagogy” applied to the teaching and formation of translators would help promote critical reflection on the unsatisfactory role that translators and their activity have been allowed to play in a culture that is still obsessed with the futile search for forever stable truths or original meanings that could be immune to change. This type of pedagogy should give future translators the opportunity to problematize the conditions in which their profession has been structured and operates inside their culture and their historical moment, and the opportunity of bettering or reversing these conditions. (Arrojo [1993] 2012, 107; see also Koskinen 2012)

If we accept the notions of undecidable moments in texts, their open-ended significations and play of meaning, translatorial decisions indeed become crucially important in terms of creating closures and directing interpretations, and hence subject to ethical reasoning. Because of the need to fix meanings, translatorial decisions are not always innocent and benign. Derrida’s own dense writing style has provided a platform for testing the limits and possibilities, losses and supplementarities of translation, leading Derrida’s translators to comment on their translation solutions (e.g. Venuti [2003] 2013; Johnson 1981; see also Davis 2001, Ch. 5; Carreres 2008), with or without a link to the notion of abusive fidelity coined by Philip Lewis (1985) to label deconstructive translation practice.

As Derrida emphasizes, following a pre-set protocol of right and wrong choices does not yet take you into the realm of ethics; it is only when these guidelines no longer serve and the terrain of unsatisfactory and impossible choices needs to be navigated without a map that we encounter the ethical. “A decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process,” Derrida has argued (1988, 24; see also Koskinen 2000, 26–30). Without ever openly referring to Derrida’s work, deconstruction’s core concepts of decision and undecidability were also taken up by Francis Jones (2004) in his personal account of the dilemmas of a literary translator in the aftermath of Yugoslav war. Translation as a balancing act not only between the self and the other but also between these two and “other others” (Jones 2004), and a situation where “any outcome brings as many problems as it solves,” places the translator firmly within the ethical realm, reaffirming the agentic and creative nature of literary translation: “[s]een in this light, the fact of having to confront apparently insoluble textual, interpersonal and ethical dilemmas is not an aberration in the work of literary translators. It is what defines their status as creative agents rather than interlingual copyists” (Jones 2004).

Deconstruction is a stance that refutes fixture and dwells on aporias, traces and inconsistencies; it is thus only logical that deconstructive ethics is similarly open-ended and undecidable. Translation, too, is an endeavour that is both impossible and necessary, and the ethics governing it is based on a double bind of unresolved undecidability and the necessity to arrive at a translation decision. This leads to the conclusion that translators need to be empowered to reach the decisions and that they need to be responsible and self-reflexive to understand and accept
the unavoidable incompleteness of their choices. In contrast to notions of fidelity and accuracy that focus on mapping the translation against the source text to identify its shortcomings, the deconstructive take on the ethics of translation is quite liberating. Hence its allure to a number of translation scholars.

While Derrida’s approach seemed to offer a new perspective to prevalent translation studies debates in the 1990s, Ricœur’s work on ethics resonates with some current burning societal issues. It is thus no wonder that during recent years, Ricœur’s conceptualizations and in particular his notion of “linguistic hospitality” have become central to some translation studies works: for example, Ricœur’s influence could be found in the articles by authors such as Wu (2008), Büyüktuncay (2017) and Bottone (2007, 2011), who see linguistic hospitality as the foundation of translational ethics, and in some monographs. For example, in his monograph dedicated to the development of a philosophy of translation, the Italian philosopher and politician Domenico Jervolino (2008) posits that we use and develop our humanity in and through language and therefore urges us to practice linguistic hospitality. Similarly, François Ost in his monograph *Traduire* (2009) argues that against the possibility of a world of one single language or that of innumerable idiolects, multilingualism and translation seen as linguistic hospitality represent humanity’s only alternative to barbarity. This is also a position taken by Arnaud Laygues (2006), who in his article connects the philosophical notions of “Being-together” (*l’être-ensemble*) as developed by Ricœur with that of “the common good” found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and with “the philosophy of dialogue” as conceptualized by Buber and Marcel (see also Chapter 11 “Translator ethics” in this volume). Laygues calls for the ethical behaviour of translators, who are often seen as a visible signs and promoters of increasing globalization, and argues that if translators maintain linguistic hospitality and therefore recognize the difference of the Other, they reduce tensions between different cultures and are also capable of resisting the process of standardization and uniformity. By enabling individual relations between persons, translators thus preserve and defend the basic principles of humanity in the world of increasing commercialization.

Sarah Maitland (2015) in her discussion of newsreel production as a form of cultural translation uses the notion of “linguistic hospitality” to describe the ethical problem of a translator who attempts, on one hand, to make difference of the Other (i.e., of what constitutes the opposite of the Self, of Us, and of the Same) accessible to the target audience, while protecting the otherness of the Other from appropriation. She develops this argument even further in her recent book *What Is Cultural Translation?* (Maitland 2017), in which she focuses on translation in its broadest term and studies it within and beyond texts in different environments and cultural domains. She argues that translation, seen as an ethical model that facilitates linguistic hospitality, makes thoughtful encounter with the Other possible and enables us not only to understand ourselves but also our position in the world.

The notion of linguistic hospitality is also central to the work of Moira Inghilleri (2012), in which she connects it to the practice of community interpreting, in particular to the ethics and politics of interpreting justice. Through her analysis of real interpreted situations, she shows that interpreters follow the principles that are based on linguistic hospitality, and consequently may, in the event of gross injustice and power abuse, breach the conventional deontological principles of neutrality in order to avoid unethical consequences. Similarly, in her book on migration and mobility, Inghilleri (2017) argues that translation is not only a communicative but also an ethical task that allows us to demonstrate linguistic hospitality by enabling us to reside in more than one language and become the host to another’s culture (31). The ethical impulse of translation becomes even more important in inhospitable environments where the participatory rights of individuals are hampered, as was the case, for example, when translators and interpreters were employed by the Immigration Service on Alice Island and Ellis Island. She also draws attention
to the fact that the withdrawal of linguistic hospitality is possible, for example, when translation is branded as heretical and therefore silenced, as it was the case in Wycliffe’s and Tyndale’s translations of the Bible (65).

As can be seen from the aforementioned, the concept of linguistic hospitality has resonated among TS scholars in recent years. It seems to capture a current preoccupation of the linguistic consequences of globalization, and hence speaks to many researchers. In contrast, Derrida’s take on the question of hospitality and languages has attracted less attention. In an article entitled “Hostipitality,” a neologism he coined, he unpacked the concept of hospitality “which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, ‘hostility’” (Derrida 2000, 3). A deconstruction of this binary opposition of hospitality/hostility through a typically complex etymological reasoning leads him to emphasize “the troubling analogy in their common origin between hostis as host and hostis as enemy, between hospitality and hostility” (15) and the consequent impossibility of full and unconditional hospitality as it always carries within itself the possibility of hostility.

According to Derrida, hospitality, which presupposes a home or a nation, is like a door the host can choose to open to welcome the other, and as such it is always also potentially hostile, hence the neologism. Derrida also explicitly links hospitality and translation, describing translation as “an enigmatic phenomenon or experience of hospitality, if not the condition of all hospitality in general” (6). Consequently, the notions of home and strangers, as well as the threshold of acceptance, are also known to affect translation flows and translation strategies. Similarly, the ambivalent power dynamics of hospitality and hostility in translation are well known through a plethora of historical and contemporary case studies. And as we remember, translation is similarly plagued by a double bind of the impossibility of full and unconditional transfer of meaning (Derrida 1985).

In translation studies, hostipitality has been taken up by Africa Vidal Claramonte (2014) to rethink the tasks of the translator and interpreter in contemporary multilingual societies and to re-vision the representation of other voices through translational practices. We can expect the ethics of hospitality to gain in importance in the near future with issues such as immigration, globalization and diversity (Molz and Gibson 2016). Recent developments across European borders and the increasing tensions and hate speech within many Western societies have brought into stark relief the immanent hostility of many encounters with strangers, and translating and interpreting practices are often implicated in the techno-political apparatus of hostipitality.

In Ricoeur’s thinking, too, hospitality is not without risk and loss. Linguistic hospitality also means that translators attempt to bring the reader to the author and the author to the reader “at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters” (Ricoeur 2006, 23), and at the same time they have to renounce the perfect translation. The translation ethos thus demands that translators accept imperfection: in order to be able to open ourselves to the difference of the other provided by the act of translation, the translator has to suffer. The suffering of translators stems from their awareness of the deficiency of every translation; they know that something will be inevitably lost through translation and they mourn the fact that perfect translation is impossible. However, this displeasure is “balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house” (Ricoeur 2006, 10). Scott-Baumann (2009) argues that translators can thus achieve satisfaction as translators only if they accept “the untranslatability, the irrefutable otherness of the other text, and, by implication, the otherness of the other person.” Translations thus promote “linguistic hospitality,” which is based on mutual recognition that “the translator and the translated are able to cohabit and agree to be different” (109).

Ricoeur’s insistence that translations are texts that create a paradoxical equivalence without total adequacy, and at the same time that the translator may deliberately distort the meaning additionally enables us to consider and assess the translator’s interventions in
ethical terms. Ricoeur’s insistence that translations are texts that create a paradoxical equivalence without total adequacy, and that the translator may deliberately distort the meaning additionally enables us to consider and assess the translator’s interventions in ethical terms. Weissbrod (2009) compares Ricoeur’s definition of translation as “equivalence without adequacy” and the concept of the (non-existing) “third text” with Toury’s concept of “the adequate translation as a hypothetical construct.” Ricoeur’s definition of a hermeneutic self is also fruitfully used by Maitland, in particular his notion of trust and his insistence on the heterogeneity of readings, which is reminiscent of deconstruction. For example, in her article “Performing Difference” Maitland (2012) argues, following Ricoeur, that the existence of difference within the original demands an act of hermeneutic trust in the heterogeneity of possible interpretations that proceed from a text. By believing in a play’s potential to speak, translators thus affirm the existence of difference within the original and recognize it as “that which requires hermeneutic trust in order to be interpreted” (66). Deconstruction further reminds us that even with optimal trust, the interpretations are always already partial and subject to further supplementarity. According to Lisa Foran (2015, 25), Ricoeur’s view is therefore a “happy” one while Derrida ruthlessly underlines the uncomfortable possibilities involved, and it is this discomfort, in particular, that allows us to reach the realm of ethics:

[W]hile Ricoeur’s account of translation as a model of hospitality has much to recommend it, and indeed much in common with Derrida’s account, it ultimately runs the risk of putting everyone on the same level. Ricoeur’s account of ethical hospitality is “happy” and pragmatic rather than uncomfortable and impossible. My claim is that his model of translation therefore (although perhaps unintentionally) levels the playing field of exchange and does not sufficiently guard against complacency. Derrida, on the other hand, by holding on to the untranslatable as the model of exchange, keeps us on the knife edge of discomfort. For Derrida we are not all on the same level where we can all be equally understood. Rather at the heart of Derrida’s account is an insurmountable difference that prevents a comfortable settling into sameness.

4 Conclusions: new debates, emerging issues

Deconstruction is not currently in vogue in ethical debates, and Ricoeur is equally seldom referred to. New debates and emerging issues are therefore difficult to find. Perhaps one such issue is the status and role of these two thinkers in itself: while deconstruction was among the early theoretical supports of the new discipline in the 1990s, perhaps Ricoeur will be found useful in the years to come. The notion of linguistic hospitality surely resonates in the multilingual societies of contemporary world of migration, globalization and trans-border employment. Hospitality and its limits also address the question of domestication versus foreignization, but from a different perspective. Rather than measuring distances between texts, both hospitality and hostipitality focus on the imagery of home, guest, invitation, alterity and otherness, opening up questions of ethics beyond the textual level. And finally, the ideas of supplementarity, gift and hospitality allow us to begin to develop non-binary ethical perspectives on non-professional volunteer forms of translating and interpreting that are not predetermined by them being the (negative and unwanted) other of professional practice.

We also believe that a reinvigorated deconstructive ethos, with its systematic doubt, would be welcome in contemporary translation studies. The increasing automation of translation, for example, is creating new ethical demands that a non-binary approach to the man versus machine
dichotomy might help us untangle in novel ways, moving from either/or perceptions to the logic of both/and (Koskinen 2000), envisioning new forms of “humachinic” translation (see also Chapter 19 “Translation and posthumanism” in this volume). On the other hand, the radical indecision of deconstruction would be a sobering approach to machine translation that celebrates instant and easy translatability of everything. Similarly, the ordeal of imperfection and undecidability present in both Ricoeur’s and Derrida’s thinking, and the following necessity of self-reflexive praxis, allows us to contemplate the limits of the current codification of professional practice and the concomitant tendency towards normativization of ethical behaviour in the various subfields of translation and interpreting.

Related topics in this volume
Translator ethics; the ethics of postcolonial translation; feminist translation ethics; ethics of translating sacred texts; ethics in public service interpreting; linguistic first aid; translation and posthumanism.

References


**Further reading**


A concise introduction to Derrida’s thinking on translation.


This essay is Derrida’s most elaborate expression of his thoughts on translation, in which he discusses the Biblical account of the destruction of the tower of Babel, writings on translation by Roman Jakobsen and Walter Benjamin and the legal definitions of translation.


This monograph, which discusses translation in its broadest term, outlines Ricœur’s thoughts on translation, and through the use of his concept of linguistic hospitality argues that translation makes thoughtful encounter with the Other possible.


A short essay which provides a clear insight into the basic concepts of Ricœur’s understanding of translation and its ethical task.


This volume, in particular chapter 6 (“Linguistic Analysis”), offers a very clear introduction into Ricœur’s conceptualization of translation as ethical activity and links the concept of “linguistic hospitality” with his other works, in particular those focusing on tolerance.